

# Florida Gopher Tortoises

## Standards-Based Activities (3rd Grade)

NOTE: This activity set can stand alone or be used as an introduction for a fieldtrip to the Museum of Science and History (MOSH) in Jacksonville, FL. Contact them at (904) 396-7062.

- 1) Reading
- 2) Writing
- 3) Math
- 4) Answers

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Created at a Pelotes Island Nature Preserve FCAT Workshop  
Sponsored by Pelotes Island Nature Preserve (JEA & FPL)  
The League of Environmental Educators in Florida (LEEF), and  
the Museum of Science and History (MOSH)  
For more Standards-Based Activities, check out  
<http://pelotes.jea.com>.

*Provided by the Pelotes Island Nature Preserve (JEA & FPL) and  
the Jacksonville Museum of Science and History (MOSH)*

# “Florida Gopher Tortoises”

This standards-based activity can stand alone or be used in conjunction with the following Environmental Activity Curricula:

Project WILD “Good Buddies” p. 104

Project Aquatic WILD “Turtle Hurdles” p. 164

PLT “Web of Life” p. 148

To learn about attending a workshop in Florida to receive these Environmental Curricula Guides, see below.

Project WET – contact Project WET State Coordinator at (386) 329-4752.

Project Learning Tree (PLT) – contact PLT State Coordinator at (850) 222-5646.

Project WILD – contact Project WILD State Coordinator at (850) 488-4676.

Project Aquatic WILD - contact Project WILD State Coordinator at (850) 488-4676.

Schoolyard Wildlife - contact Project WILD State Coordinator at (850) 488-4676.

# Florida's Gopher Tortoise

## Standards-Based Reading Questions

### Gopher Tortoises

Turtles carry their shells on their backs. They can't set this carapace down when it gets heavy. It's part of their body. The gopher tortoise is an important Florida turtle. This reptile eats plants. It can grow to fifteen inches long.

The gopher tortoise digs a burrow to live in. This long underground tunnel is used by 350 other forest animals too! Some of these animals are small like ants. Others are big like snakes. This underground space gives animals a place to hide during forest fires or bad storms. Over 1,100 kinds of animals depend on the tortoise's burrow for safety! Gopher tortoises are called a *keystone* species. They are the "key" to safety for many other animals and plants.

Tortoises are disappearing from Florida. This affects all of those other animals too. Where will these animals hide without tortoise burrows? Many tortoises are killed by cars. Others are killed by hunters - even though it's against the law to kill one. The biggest danger to tortoises is loss of living space or habitat. As people build new homes, roads, and stores, tortoise habitats get destroyed.

Gopher tortoises have to be at least eight-years-old before they can have babies. Many of the growing tortoises are getting squashed by cars before they turn eight. That means fewer babies are getting born. That's why tortoises are disappearing. What can you do to help tortoises? The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission made these laws:

- 1- Don't kill, eat, or bother a gopher tortoise.
- 2- Don't put one in your car - unless you're taking a hurt one to the vet.
- 3- Don't keep them as pets. They should be free in the wild.
- 4- Don't move them from one spot to another. Many tortoises have a coughing sickness. If you move a sick one to a new spot, other tortoises will catch it too.
- 5- Don't let your pet bother a tortoise. The City of Jacksonville says all dogs and cats must be on leashes when they're outside.

We can all work together to protect this important animal. You can visit two gopher tortoises at the Museum of Science and History. To find out how to visit Emmet and Gooder, call MOSH at (904) 396-7062.

### **Resources**

- Bruchac, Joseph and Jonathon London. Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back. Philomel Books, 1992.
- Caduto, Michael and Joseph Bruschac. Keepers of the Earth. Fulcrum, Inc., 1988
- Chatfield, June. A Look Inside Reptiles. A Readers Digest Young Families Book, Joshua Morris Publishing, Inc., 1995.
- Gopher Tortoises: A Species in Decline, pamphlet. Gopher Tortoise Council. Florida Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 11780, Gainesville, FL 32611.
- Hilcourt, William. The New Field Book of Nature Activities and Hobbies. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970.
- Johnson, Fred. Turtles and Tortoises. The National Wildlife Federation: Washington, D.C., 1973.
- Liantz, Peggy Sias and Wendy A. Hale. The Young Naturalists Guide to Florida. Pineapple Press: Sarasota, 1994.
- Roth, Charles E. The Amateur Naturalist Explorations and Investigations. Franklin Watts Press, 1993.
- Schubert, Jean. Personal Interview. MOSH - Museum of Science and History in Jacksonville, FL. August 2001. (904) 396-7062.

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# Florida's Gopher Tortoise

## Standards-Based Reading Questions, continued

1. According to the article, which of the following is a reason that there are fewer gopher tortoises in the wild today?
  - a) The tortoises are trying to eat meat instead of plants.
  - b) They are getting run over by cars.
  - c) They are drowning in wetlands.
  - d) Too many other animals are crowding into their burrows.
  
2. According to the article, what agency protects gopher tortoises in Florida?
  - a) Environmental Protection Agency
  - b) St. Augustine Alligator Farm
  - c) Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
  - d) The Department of Environmental Protection
  
3. The following sentences are contained in this article. "Turtles carry their shells on their backs. They can't set this carapace down when it gets heavy. It's part of their body." Based on context clues, what is the meaning of the word "carapace"?
  - a) Head
  - b) Shell
  - c) Weight
  - d) House
  
4. According to the article the gopher tortoise is considered a Keystone species. Why is the gopher tortoise considered so important?
  - a) It spreads a coughing illness to other nearby animals.
  - b) It is the only land tortoise in Florida.
  - c) Its eggs provide food for many animals like raccoons and wild pigs.
  - d) Its burrow gives other animals a place to live and hide.
  
5. Which of the following are ways the author suggests you can help gopher tortoises?
  - a) Keep your dog on a leash so it can't bother tortoises.
  - b) Move them to safer places if they're near a busy road.
  - c) Feed them wild plants.
  - d) Put them in the water.

## Florida's Gopher Tortoise

### Standards-Based Reading Questions, continued

6. What do you think the author's main purpose was in writing this article?
- a) To show why gopher tortoises are important
  - b) To blame people for the gopher tortoises' disappearance
  - c) To teach readers about Florida laws
  - d) To explain where people can see gopher tortoises today
7. Which of the following is the best definition for a "keystone species"?
- a) An animal or plant at the top of the food chain
  - b) An animal or plant that only eats plants
  - c) An animal or plant that depends on many other animals for survival
  - d) An animal or plant that many other animals depend on for survival

## Florida's Gopher Tortoise

### Standards-Based Writing Prompts

1. The number of gopher tortoises living in Florida is getting smaller. Think about some animals that you like. Write to explain what you would do if your favorite animal started to disappear.
2. The gopher tortoise carries its shell on its back. Think about how it would feel to if you had a shell on your back. Write to explain how having a shell might affect your daily activities.
3. Gopher tortoises eat plants. Think about the kinds of food you like to eat. Write a story about the first time you tasted your favorite food.
4. Gopher tortoises dig burrows that provide shelter for over 350 kinds of animals. Imagine that you are only three inches tall and visit a tortoise's underground burrow. Write a story about your experiences in that burrow.

## Florida's Gopher Tortoise

### Standards-Based Math Questions

1. A female gopher tortoise can lay up to 15 eggs at a time. If a gopher tortoise lays its eggs once a year, what is the greatest amount of eggs a gopher tortoise can lay in 3 years?
  - a) 15 eggs
  - b) 25 eggs
  - c) 35 eggs
  - d) 45 eggs
2. Gopher tortoises are usually less than one and a half feet long. Which of the following units would be the most appropriate for measuring the length of a gopher tortoise?
  - a) Inches
  - b) Liters
  - c) Kilometers
  - d) Miles

#### Search for Gopher Tortoise Activity at the Pelotes Island Nature Preserve

Burrow Number	6/10/99	6/15/99	6/17/99	6/22/99	6/24/99	6/29/99
C1	None	None	None	None	Activity	
C2	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	
C3	None	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	
C5	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	
D1	None	Activity	Activity	None	Activity	

#### **Field Notes:**

Information collected by reptile scientist Chuck Schaffer.

“Activity” means that small sticks placed in front of the burrow were moved as a tortoise came in and out of his burrow.

“None” means that the small sticks were not moved, showing a tortoise was not going in and out of the burrow.

Use the table “Search for Gopher Tortoise Activity at the Pelotes Island Nature Preserve” and the field notes to answer the following questions.

## Florida's Gopher Tortoise

### Standards-Based Math Questions, continued

3. On which of the following dates did the scientist record activity on three of the five burrows?
- a) 6/10/99
  - b) 6/15/99
  - c) 6/17/99
  - d) 6/22/99
4. Burrow C3 showed activity on four out of five days. Which of the following fractions is the same as four out of five?
- a)  $\frac{4}{10}$
  - b)  $\frac{40}{100}$
  - c)  $\frac{8}{10}$
  - d)  $\frac{5}{4}$
5. What is the ratio of total "None" observations to total "Activity" observations from 6/10/99 to 6/24/99?
- a)  $\frac{7}{18}$
  - b)  $\frac{18}{7}$
  - c)  $\frac{7}{17}$
  - d)  $\frac{18}{6}$
6. What percentage of the burrows on 6/17/99 showed activity?
- a) 20%
  - b) 50%
  - c) 80%
  - d) 100%

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# Florida's Gopher Tortoise - Answers

## Writing

For All – Use the rubric for Florida Writes! – 6 points

1. LA.B.1.2.2, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.B.2.2.6
2. LA.B.1.2.2, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.B.2.2.6
3. LA.B.1.2.2, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.B.2.2.5
4. LA.B.1.2.2, LA.B.2.2.3, LA.B.2.2.5, SC.G.1.2.1

## Math

1. c) MA.A.3.2.2, MA.A.3.2.3
2. d) MA.B.4.2.1
3. a) MA.E.1.2.1, MA.A.1.2.4
4. c) MA.A.1.2.4
5. d) MA.E.1.2.1, MA.A.1.2.4
6. c) MA.A.1.2.4

## Reading

1. b) LA.A.2.2.1, Bloom's Taxonomy Level One
2. c) LA.A.2.2.1, SS.C.1.2.1, Bloom's Taxonomy Level One
3. b) LA.A.2.2.1, Bloom's Taxonomy Level One
4. d) LA.A.2.2.1, SC.G.1.2.1, Bloom's Taxonomy Level One
5. a) LA.A.2.2.1, SS.C.2.2.2, Bloom's Taxonomy Level One
6. a) LA.A.2.2.2, Bloom's Taxonomy Level Two
7. d) LA.A.2.2.1, SC.G.1.2.1, Bloom's Taxonomy Level One

## Grading Resources:

Sunshine State Standards can be found at <http://finr.edu/dae//menu/sss.htm>

Grading Rubrics can be found at <http://www.finr.edu/sas/fcat.htm> under "What Every Teacher Should Know About FCAT"

Additional information about FCAT can be found at <http://www.finr.edu/sas/fcat.htm>