Tails, Tails, Tails (3 year olds)

At a glance:
Children will discover that animals use their tails in different ways.

Time requirement
45 minutes

Group size and grade(s)
3 year olds
5-11 children/instructor

Materials
- Tails by Matthew Van Fleet
- Poster boards of different animals, matching tails, tape
- Lyrics to the song
- Fabric tails (pre-made) and spots
- Set of pretend tails with clothespins
- Assorted pictures of animals with tails

Objective(s)
1. Match the animal with the correct tail.
2. Identify 3 animals and what they would use their tail for.
3. Meet animals up close and learn about their specific tails.
4. Create a craft and develop fine motor skills.
5. Practice taking turns and sharing.

Theme
Animals use their tails for different reasons.

Sub-themes
1. The appearance of an animal’s tail provides clues to how it uses its tail.

Academic standards
| National Science Educational Standards | 
| Benchmarks for Science Literacy (Project 2061) | 
| Ohio Science Academic Content Standards | 
| Kentucky Core Content—Science | 
| Indiana Science Standards |
Background
From a displaying peacock to an opossum climbing in a tree, animals possess some remarkable tails. Tails can be used to communicate, to escape predators, to move around, and to assist in catching prey. With such a wide variety of uses, no wonder there is such a wide variety of tails!

Some tails help animals balance whether the animal is in a tree or on the ground. A cheetah’s tail is used to help balance, not only when running, but especially when turning. Their tails are flat on each side, much like a rudder on a boat, which also helps them turn. Kangaroos will lean back on their tail, balancing their weight and freeing their legs to kick enemies or even other kangaroos. Arboreal monkeys such as langurs, colobus, and Diana monkeys use their tail to help them balance when foraging in the trees.

Other tails are wonderful communication devices. Ring-tailed lemurs will rub their long tail in between their wrists and scent glands, “stinking” up their tail. They then waive their tail over their head in the direction of other lemurs to warn them to back off. The stinkiest lemur usually wins! Alarm can also be communicated by tails. White-tailed deer will raise their tail, signaling to other deer of danger in the area and rattlesnakes will warn away a potential predator by shaking their tail. Not all communication is to warn away predators, however. Peacocks use their long feathers to communicate their interest in peahens.

In addition, tails are used for swimming, climbing (prehensile tails), flying, and in defense. From whales and manatees, to lizards and elephants, tails come in all shapes and sizes. Regardless of what they look like, however, tails serve important purposes.

Vocabulary
Arboreal - Living in trees
Predator – An animal that hunts another animal.
Prehensile tail - Adapted for seizing, grasping, or holding, especially by wrapping around an object:

Activities/Program
Introduction (10 minutes)
Getting ready
Tape the posters of animals (macaw, manatee, kangaroo, fish, zebra, cow, opossum, etc.) up on the wall. You may either leave the tails completely off all the pictures or put the wrong tail on each picture. Make sure you have the tails and assorted pictures of animals (elephant, kangaroo, manatee, cheetah, etc.) ready to go.

Doing the activity
1. Welcome the class to the Zoo and the class, “Tails, Tails, Tails”. Introduce the instructor and each child.
2. Point out the poster boards around the room of animals. Can the kids figure out what’s missing from each animal? (They have no tail or the wrong tail!)
3. Explain that the tails got mixed up and you need their help sorting them out.
4. Ask for volunteers or have the kids tell you where to put each tail.
5. For each tail, briefly talk about what the animal would use its tail
Animals that may be included are:
- Peacock – attract a mate
- Cheetah – balance
- Manatee – swimming
- Kangaroo – leaning
- Fish – swimming
- Zebra – flyswatter
- Cow – flyswatter
- Opossum – climbing (prehensile tail)

6. Show them pictures of different animals and their tails. Look at ways they are similar or different and discuss that animals’ tails look different because they use them for different things.

Wrap-up
Animals without their tails (or their wrong tails) just don’t look right! Kids will agree that each tail fits the animal!

What’s the Use? (5 minutes)
Getting ready
Put up the lyrics to the song, have pictures of the animals ready.

Doing the activity
1. Review with the kids that animals have lots of different tails and that they use these tails for different things. Some are for balancing, communication, flying, climbing, and even swimming.
2. Tape up pictures of the spider monkey (climbing), peacock (impress girls), alligator (swimming), cheetah (balance), and rattlesnake (keep safe).
   Briefly discuss what each uses its tail for.
3. Ask kids to help you with the motions as you sing about each animal.

“One Animal Tail” Song
(to the tune of “London Bridge is Falling Down”)

Spider monkey tails are long
(hold hands far apart)
Tails are long
Tails are long
Spider monkey tails are long
To help them climb. (pretend to climb with hands)

Peacock tails are long and bright
(hold both arms above your head, then fan them out to mimic a peacock spreading out his tail.)
Long and bright
Long and bright
Peacock tails are long and bright
To find a girlfriend (hold hands over heart)

Alligator tails are strong (make a muscle)
Tails are strong
Tails are strong
Alligator tails are strong
To help them swim. (make swimming motion with hands)

Cheetah tails are long with spots
(hold hands far apart)
Long with spots
Long with spots
Cheetah tails are long with spots
To help them run. (make pretend running motions with feet and arms)

Rattlesnakes have tails that shake
(shake hands)
Tails that shake
Tails that shake
Rattlesnakes have tails that shake
To keep them safe. (wrap arms around themselves)
Wrap-up
Compliment the kids on their singing and what a great job they did pretending to be different animals. Tails can be used for a lot of different things.

Wear the Tails (10 minutes)
Getting ready
Make sure each tail has a clothespin attached to the back of it. Tails will include rabbit, tiger, zebra, giraffe, cat, fish, and beaver.

Doing the activity
1. Ask each child to try on a tail and guess what animal might have a tail like it. Practice moving like that animal.
2. Encourage them to try on different tails and share.

Wrap-up
Did the children have a favorite tail? Which animal had a tail like that? Depending on what the tail looked like, the kids had to move in different ways.

Animal Encounters (15 minute)
Getting ready
Gather kids to the circle and review the rules for animal time. Make sure you have hand soap ready to go.

Doing the activity
Possible animals include: skunk, alligator, and crocodile skink (I tried for the skunk and alligator first). Things to focus on for each animal include:
- What does its tail look like?
- What is its tail covered in?
- Where does the animal live?
- What does it use its tail for?

- Alligator
  - Tail is about as long as rest of body.
  - Shape is flattened on the sides
  - Protected by scales and bony ridges
  - Tail is important for locomotion – helps it swim in water
  - As alligator ages, it loses yellow banding on back of body.
  - Reaches 6 feet at about 10-12yr.
  - Out smaller gators were born in July ’02 and Largo was probably born February ‘02

- Blue Tongued Skink
  - Some lizards, including skinks, can lose their tail in a fight – regenerates giving them enough time to get away. Has a pre-determined break away point where muscles constrict, once tail is lost, preventing loss of body fluid. When tail regenerates, it is not as uniform or large as original tail.
  - Some lizards use their tail as a storage for fat so that in lean times, has a food supply.

- Spiny Tailed Lizard
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Wrap-up
Review similarities and differences in the tails of the animals they saw. Reinforce what each animal used its tail for.

Make and Take a Tail (5 minutes)
Getting ready
Gather supplies (felt tails, sticky back spots, cups for the spots)

**Doing the activity**
1. Ask the kids what they would have to do to turn into the fastest animal on land – the cheetah. Explain that in order to run that fast, they would have to change some things about themselves including their tail! The tail is a rudder, helping the cheetah turn right or left.
2. Pass out a tail and cup with spots to each child. Each cup should have about 5-8 spots in it. Encourage them to stick on the spots however they would like and then try on their tail!

**Wrap-up**
Even though we don’t really have a tail, it is fun to pretend to have one!

**Assessment**
1. Ask kids to identify pictures of animals with tails that:
   – help the animal swim
   – have a rattle
   – etc.

**Extension**
1. Look for animals in the Zoo that have tails that:
   – help the animal move through trees.
   – help the animal swim
   – help the animal protect itself.
2. Design different tails out of construction paper to wear at home.
3. Find old magazines and cut out pictures of animals and their tails – make them into Memory cards and play a game trying to match the tail with the animal.

**Resources**
*Tails* by Matthew Van Fleet