



Picture Book Patterns for Raccoons and Ripe Corn

by Jim Arnosky
Lothrop, Lee & Shepard

It's a beautiful fall evening. As the moon rises over a field of ripe corn, a mother raccoon brings her two young, almost-grown raccoons to eat. A nightlong feast begins as the hungry raccoons pull the corn-stalks down to the ground and devour the plump ears of corn. Artist and naturalist Jim Arnosky shares another wonderful wildlife-watching experience with children.

Who Is That Masked Creature?

Share some interesting information about raccoons... furry little mammals with bushy, ringed tails and bands of black hair around their eyes that make them look as if they're wearing a mask. Although raccoons are about the size as big house cats, they look larger than a cat because they have a much thicker coat and longer legs. Home for the raccoon is a den usually found in a hollow tree near a forest stream where the raccoon catches its favorite foods—fish and frogs. A raccoon eats almost anything from turtles and snails to insects, birds' eggs, mice, nuts, seeds, fruit, and especially ripe corn.



Raccoons are nocturnal animals that sleep during the day and prowl from dusk until dawn in search of food.



They have five long slender fingers with shaped claws on each of their four paws. A raccoon's fingers are very flexible, making it easy for them to handle objects. Raccoons' paws look much like the hands of a small child. Baby raccoons, called kits, are born in the spring. Helpless and unable to see, the mother raccoon takes good care of them. After about 10 weeks, the kits are ready to leave the den and see the world. They stay with their mother for about one year while she teaches them how to climb trees to escape danger, find food to eat, and take care of themselves. Baby raccoons are clever and full of curiosity. They wander off to climb, explore, dig, and pick up objects to examine.

Fall is feasting time for raccoons and, as the days grow shorter, they eat more in order to build up the thick layer of fat needed to carry them through the winter. At the first snowfall, raccoons head for their den and, although they do not hibernate, they sleep—snug and warm—through most of the winter.

Fun Facts

Share fun and interesting facts about raccoons.

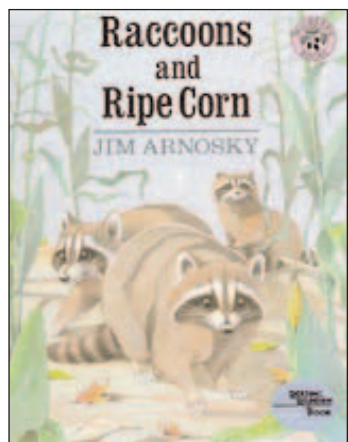
- Raccoons are related to pandas.
- Many raccoons live on farms or in suburban areas. They become a nuisance when they tip over garbage cans, open storage sheds, or raid gardens.
- The Algonquin Indians called raccoons arakun, which means "he scratches with his hands."
- Some people think raccoons "wash" their food before eating it. This is seen most often in raccoons that live in captivity. Actually these raccoons are dunking the food in water and imitating the way they would catch food if they lived in the wild.
- Raccoons do not make good pets. As they grow older, they may bite or scratch. They want to be free.



A Closer Look

As you read *Raccoons and Ripe Corn*, an interesting story about a raccoon mother and her almost-grown kits, take a closer look at each of the pictures. Ask the children to be on the look-

out for signs of other wildlife in the illustrations. After reading the story, have the kids list or draw pictures of some of the other creatures in the illustrations...a beetle, caterpillar, geese, bat, owl, spider, mouse, birds, and deer. Talk about the fact that these animals were hardly noticed while reading the story and discuss the fact that animals in nature often hide to protect themselves. Expand your discussion to include how color, shape, and other characteristics camouflage animals so that they can survive. What other animals hide in nature?



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Creative Actions

Talk about and list the many action words or verbs that can be found in the story... sneak, walk, climb, pull, peel, feast, and hurry. Then have fun creating the reproducible goggles as you turn your kids into mischievous raccoons. Reproduce the goggle pattern on brown construction paper and have the children use a black crayon to color the area around the eyes. Next, cut out the goggles and eyeholes and glue goggle stems to each side. Point out the two different sized stems and have children cut the size that best fits over their ears. Encourage everyone to be a rascally raccoon as they act out the movement of the raccoons while you read the story again!



Corny History

Corn, an American plant grown by Indians in North, Central, and South America, has been around for thousands of years. Columbus and his men are thought to be the first Europeans to find corn in the New World. They took the corn back to Spain and from there it spread around the world. Corn was important to the Native Americans who called corn “mahiz,” later known as maize. Native Americans helped the new settlers in America plant, grow, and prepare corn to eat. The corn was made into bread, porridge, soup, corn cakes, and pudding. It was extremely valuable to the settlers, who found more land on which to grow their corn as they moved west. Make corn bread...a special food that the first settlers enjoyed.

CORN BREAD

- 1-1/4 c. all-purpose flour
- 3/4 c. corn meal
- 1/4 c. sugar
- 2 t. baking powder
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1 c. skim milk
- 1/4 c. vegetable oil
- 1 egg, beaten

Preheat oven to 400°. Combine all the dry ingredients and stir in the milk, oil and egg. Mix just until the dry ingredients are moistened. Pour the batter into a greased 8 or 9-inch square pan and bake 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm!

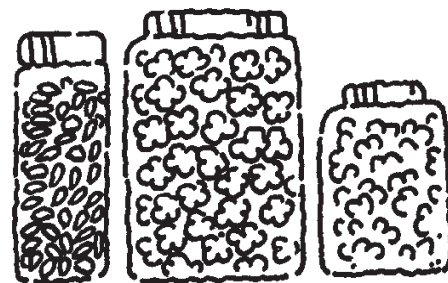
Amazing Maize

Almost everything we eat or touch has corn in it—corn-starch, corn oil, ethanol, dex-trins, dextrose, fructose syrup, corn syrup—the list goes on and on. Research corn and discover just how many different ways corn is used to produce products that we use each day. Set up a display of food labels and other products that use corn.

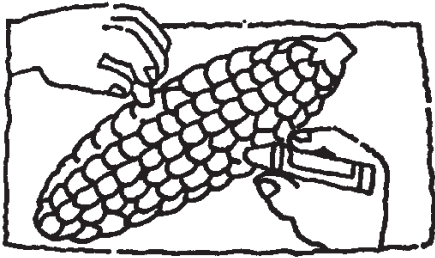


Kernel Counting

Plan a few fun math projects using corn, beginning with an exercise in estimating. Place 100 kernels of popcorn, popped corn, and candy corn in three different see-through containers. Display the containers and talk about the differences in size and shape of each kind of corn. Ask the children to estimate the number of kernels in each container by writing their name and their estimate on a small slip of paper. Divide the children into three groups and count the corn. Award the filled container to the winning estimator.

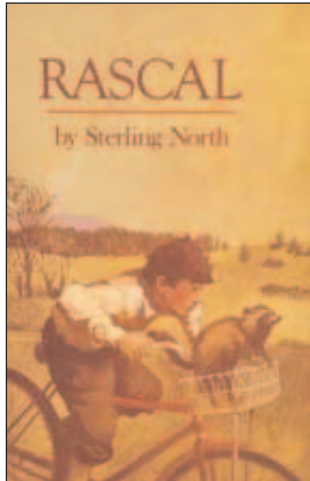


Find out how many kernels are can be found on one ear of corn by counting the rows of corn and then the number of kernels in one row. Multiply the number of rows times the number in each row to find the number of kernels. Count several ears. How do they compare?



Corn Collage

After observing Arnosky's illustration of an ear of corn, help the kids make corn collages. Give each child a corncob shape that has been reproduced on heavy paper or tagboard. Ask the children to color in each kernel or glue popcorn kernels on the shape. Then add husks of green construction paper and corn silk made with a few strands of brown yarn. Create a fall bulletin board using real corn stalks and attach the children's corn collages to the stalks. Add a scarecrow, animals, insects, birds, and of course a raccoon...everything you might find in a cornfield!



Rascals to Read About

Raccoons have a reputation of getting into loads of mischief that not everyone appreciates. As a special treat for the children, enjoy a chapter each day of **Rascal** (Dutton), Sterling North's autobiographical tale about a wild baby raccoon that he raised when he was a boy.



Or read Nancy Shaw's **Raccoon Tune** (Henry Holt) a story about a family of mischievous raccoons who prowl around the neighborhood, rummaging through sleeping people's trash in search of special treats. Kids will laugh out loud as they share this lively night outing, told in animated verse and action-filled pictures.



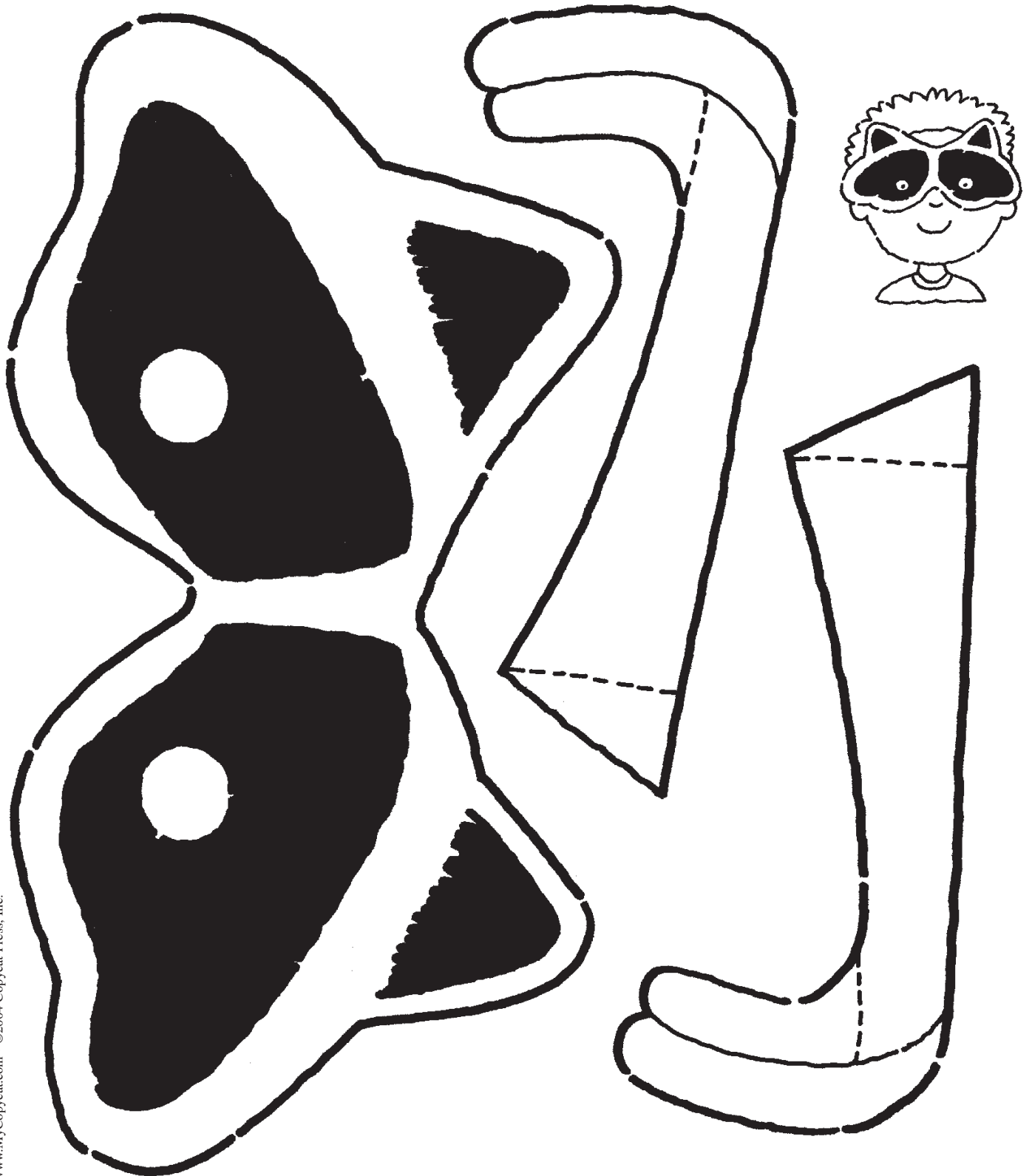
Masked Bandits

After sharing stories of raccoons (storybooks or personal accounts), use the reproducible story page to motivate children to write a story about these little masked creatures. Brainstorm a list of words that could be used in the stories (raccoon, rascal, bandit, mask, corn, steal, etc.) so that children will have a word bank to help with spelling. Then get everyone started with a few ideas or story starters and encourage creative writing!



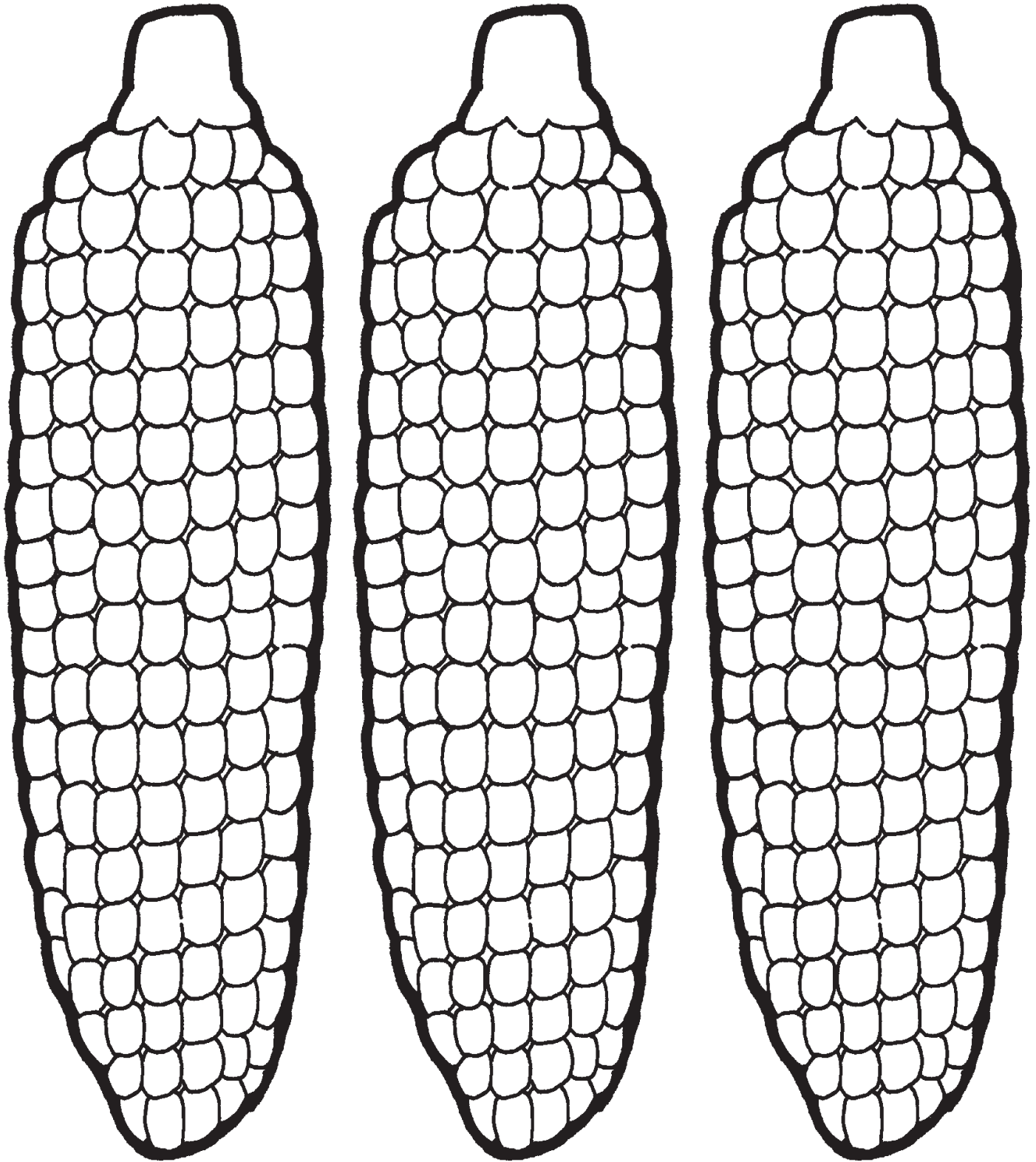
Raccoon Goggles Pattern

Turn students into rascally raccoons with these charming raccoon goggles. Reproduce the pattern on brown construction paper and have kids use a black crayon to color the area around the eyes. Next, have children cut out the goggles and eyeholes and glue stems to each side, selecting the size that fits best.



Corn Collage Pattern

Reproduce the corncob patterns on tagboard or heavy paper. Have the children glue popcorn kernels onto the shape, row by row. Trace or reproduce the husk pattern on green or light brown construction paper and add a few short lengths of brown yarn at the top for corn silk.



Name _____

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 10 sets of three horizontal lines (top solid, middle dashed, bottom solid).



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 10 sets of three horizontal lines (top solid, middle dashed, bottom solid).