

The Toad Maze

“Do you have what it takes to be THE toad?”



This interactive and educational obstacle course can be set up in the classroom or the great outdoors utilizing a few simple materials you probably have lying around. Be creative and adapt it to fit your available resources, focal species, or specific conservation issues. Remember, this can be the Salamander, Frog or Caecilian Maze too! Audiences range from 3 years old to adults. Need help coming up with ideas to adapt the messages for your unique and amazing amphibian? Contact rachel@amphibianark.org.

Objective: In the toad maze, participants will experience the life cycle of a toad while learning about some of the natural, and man made threats, they face in their habitat.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Toad vests (rectangular piece of dark colored fabric with a circle cut out in the middle to slip over the head)
Prepared direction signs with stakes (message for each sign below)
Velcro
2 Blue tarps
Felt algae with Velcro (green or brown felt cut out like the shape of a cloud)
Plastic bottles with skull and cross bones
Plastic insects and fish
Long string or jute twine, ground pegs or tent stakes
Laminated animal photos (egret, raccoon, bullfrog, fish, calling Houston toads, toad egg strands)
Large box or blanket with two chairs
Pine needles/sticks/leaves
Beach ball
Sidewalk, long piece of butcher paper, or yoga mat
Recording of Houston toad call (optional)
A couple of volunteers

TO START:

Our little toads will begin by slipping their toad vest over their head (transforming them into a Houston toad). The vest has Velcro patches stuck to it where the children will stick their food items as they make their way through the maze. The little toads will follow the instructional signs throughout the maze.

Stop 1:

“You are one of thousands of tadpoles that have hatched from toad eggs in the pond. Tadpoles start out as **herbivores**, eating algae and plant material in the pond. Wriggle through the pond and pick up some algae and stick it to your vest. Be sure to watch out for pollution in the pond, and the fish too! Toad tadpoles can be harmed by pollutants in the water and can be eaten by fish!”

Set Up: Blue tarp laid out (pond) with felt algae scattered throughout the pond. The algae have Velcro attached to them so it can be affixed to the vest. Also, scatter plastic bottles with skull and cross bones and plastic fish in the pond to signify pollutants and predators in the water.



Stop 2:

“You have grown legs, developed lungs, and absorbed your tail. This process is called **metamorphosis**. It is now time to crawl out of the pond as a small toad. You are a tasty snack for many predators, and there are cattle all around the pond that may step on you! Carefully step through the obstacle course avoiding predators, *and do not touch the string*, otherwise you might get stepped on!”

Set Up: Lay out string in a pattern that children will have to carefully hop through without touching the strings. Also post up some laminated pictures of predators on stakes (i.e. heron, raccoon and bullfrogs.) they must also avoid.



Step 3:

“You have made it into the forest canopy. It is now time to move through the native grasses eating lots of bugs. Now that you are a toad, you have switched to a **carnivorous** diet! Look through the habitat to find some yummy invertebrates to eat and stick one on your jacket!”

Set Up: Lay out logs and mulch and scatter out and hide plastic bugs with Velcro attached to them.



Stop 4:

“It's summertime, and boy, it's starting to get hot! You are in danger of drying out and your skin must stay moist. Some toads are adapted to burrow into deep sandy soil with their back legs, and hibernate while it is too hot. Go into your burrow backwards to keep safe and cool during the hot summer.”

Set Up: Set up a card board/tunnel or two chairs with a blanket draped across so the little toads can go into it, and come out the other side. Cover the box and/or tunnel with sand, pine needles or leaves to make it look like they are going underground.



Step 5:

“After hibernating for many months and coming out occasionally to eat bugs, heavy rains come. It is time for you to make your way to a pond so you can lay eggs of your own. You listen for the sound of male Houston toads calling and make your way to the pond. Unfortunately, you come across a road and will need to cross it without getting squished! Try to make it across the road without getting hit by the car.”

Set Up:

Use long butcher paper, sidewalk or yoga mat that the kids have to jump cross. One or two volunteers will be on each end with beach balls they will gently bounce at the children.



Final Stop 6:

“You are the one in a thousand little tadpoles that have made it back to the pond to lay your eggs, congratulations! Wow, life as a toad is not as easy as it seems!”

Set Up: Layout another blue tarp and have a cut out of a calling toad on a stake with laminated pictures of egg strands on the tarp. You can also have a CD player playing the call of your toad. They will give up their Velcro food items and receive a stamp or sticker.

