

# Mountains to the Sea Discovery Bin

As students travel from the mountains to the sea in the South Carolina Aquarium, they will have the opportunity to utilize critical thinking and sensory learning through the use of artifacts located in the Mountains to the Sea Discovery Bin.

## Objectives

- Students will receive hands-on learning opportunities about the plants and animals located in the Aquarium.
- Students will actively engage with the Aquarium’s galleries and exhibits in a unique way.

## Materials

- Aquarium map
- Magnifying glasses (8)
- Artifact/prop descriptions
- Bald eagle skull
- Bald eagle talon
- River otter fur
- Webbed feet
- Red clay sediment
- Alligator scute
- Alligator tooth
- Stack of cups
- Snake skeleton
- Snake shed
- Rattlesnake rattle
- Pluff mud scent jar
- Bird track pictures
- Octopus beak
- Octopus anatomy picture
- Stuffed animal fish (2)
- Shark jaw
- Megalodon shark tooth
- Loggerhead skull
- Plastic bag in jar
- Jelly picture
- Stingray barb

## Procedure

- 1) Teachers may check out a discovery bin from the Aquarium’s Information Desk (located on the left inside the main doors).
  - Use of the bin is free, but checking it out requires a driver’s license and signed waiver.
- 2) Take students up the escalator to the second floor. This will bring you to the entrance of the Mountain Forest.
- 3) Using the guide, show students each artifact as you reach the appropriate spot on the tour.
- 4) Drop the discovery bin off at the Information Desk when complete and retrieve your license.
  - If artifacts are damaged, teachers will be responsible for a \$50 fee.

## Artifact Information

	Exhibit	Artifact/Prop
1	Bald Eagle Exhibit (second-floor Mountain Forest entrance)	Bald eagle skull, bald eagle talons
2	Mountain Forest (River Otter Exhibit)	River otter fur, webbed glove
3	Piedmont	Red clay sediment
4	Coastal Plain (Carolina Bay Exhibit)	Magnifying glasses
5	Coastal Plain (American Alligator Exhibit)	Alligator scute, alligator tooth, stack of cups
6	Coastal Plain (Longleaf Pines Exhibit)	Snake skeleton, snake shed, rattlesnake rattle
7	Saltmarsh Aviary	Pluff mud scent jar, bird track pictures
8	Coast (Camouflage Exhibit)	Octopus beak, octopus anatomy picture
9	Ocean (Great Ocean Tank Exhibit)	Fast fish stuffed animal, slow fish stuffed animal
10	Ocean (Great Ocean Tank Exhibit)	Shark jaw, megalodon tooth
11	Zucker Family Sea Turtle Recovery™	Loggerhead skull, plastic bag in jar, jelly picture
12	The Shallows	Stingray barb

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## 1 – Bald Eagle Exhibit

Bald eagles are large raptors, or birds of prey. Birds of prey refers to birds that are carnivores (consume meat). Bald eagles feed on fish, birds, rabbits and other small mammals. Other birds of prey include hawks, owls and falcons. Bald eagles are known for their white feathered heads and symbolism to our country. Bald eagles typically weigh between 8-15 pounds and grow up to 37 inches (3 feet) tall with a wing span of up to 7.5 feet. They are great hunters that can locate their prey from 3 miles away. As the swoop down to capture their prey, they grab it with their powerful talons (feet).

Bald eagle skull – Point out the position of the eyes to the students. The eyes face forward for great hunting. Instruct the students to look at the beak. Bald eagles have curved beaks for ripping apart their prey. Ask them if they can locate where the brain would be.

Bald eagle talon – Point out the sharp points. Mention how powerful their feet are for squeezing their prey.

Liberty is our American bald eagle. She was found with a left wing injury that we believe occurred when she flew into a power line. Because of this injury, she underwent a partial wing amputation. Now, Liberty is unable to fly, and therefore cannot hunt. She is well taken care of at the Aquarium and has her very own tree and mini pond. Plus, she gets free fish every day!

## 2 – Mountain Forest (River Otter Exhibit)

River otters are aquatic mammals. They live in freshwater (and on occasion, brackish water), and can be found throughout the state of South Carolina in rivers and tidal creeks. They do not live in the ocean, unlike the sea otters you typically see in the Pacific. River otters have thick fur to help them survive in the cold water of the upstate rivers. They use their webbed feet and strong tail to swim and quickly catch their prey. They predominantly feed on fish but will also eat salamanders, frogs, mice, rabbits, turtles and bird eggs. They can grow up to 4 feet long and weigh as much as 23 pounds.

River otter fur - Scientists estimate that otters have 380,000 hairs per square inch. There is more hair in one square inch on an otter than we have on our whole body. This thick layer helps regulate their body temperature in cold water.

Webbed feet – Instruct the students to put on the webbed glove. Ask them to move their arm up and down to feel the resistance. Explain how this allows otters to swim quickly. Ask them to be on the lookout during the rest of the tour to see if any other animals have webbed feet. (Examples include: alligators, freshwater turtles and ducks.)

Our two resident otters, Charlie and Beau, came to the Aquarium as pups from Potter Park Zoo in Lansing, Michigan in the spring of 2021.

## 3 – Piedmont

South Carolina is made up of six geographic land regions (Blue Ridge Mountains, Piedmont, Sandhills, Inner Coastal Plain, Outer Coastal Plain and the Coast). *Piedmont* stands for foot of the mountains and the rolling hills connect the mountains to the flatter parts of South Carolina. It is known for its red clay sediment.

Red clay sediment – Show this to the students and have them look around the Piedmont Gallery to see the color of the sediment (brown walls) in the exhibits. Have them look at the Brownwater Swamp Exhibit in the Coastal Plain Gallery. Explain that the color of the water comes from the red clay washing down from the Piedmont region.

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## 4 – Coastal Plain (American Alligator Exhibit)

American alligators are native to the southeastern region of the United States. Alligators are reptiles that can grow up to 16 feet in length and weigh up to 1000 pounds. They are large carnivores that will feed on fish, turtles, snakes, frogs, birds and small mammals. Their jaws are very powerful (with a bite force of 3000 pounds per square inch) and contain 80–100 teeth. The teeth are hollow, allowing more teeth to grow underneath so they can easily replace a tooth. They have osteoderms, also known as scutes, which are bony plates found along their back and tail. The scutes acts as a solar panel, soaking up the sun's heat and warming up their cold-blooded bodies when the temperature drops.

Alligator scute – Let students hold the scute and have them locate the scutes on the alligator's back and tail. Talk to them about how reptiles are cold blooded and their temperature is the same inside as the environment outside. The scutes help the alligator warm up when they lay in the sun.

Alligator tooth – Show the students how the tooth is hollow and tell them how alligators never run out of teeth. As one tooth falls out another one is waiting underneath to take its place. Demonstrate this process with the stack of cups. This is an important adaptation for an animal that lives at the top of the food chain and eats only meat.

## 5 – Coastal Plain (Carolina Bay Exhibit)

A Carolina bay is a type of wetland habitat that has very low nutrients in the soil. This makes it the perfect habitat for carnivorous plants, such as pitcher plants and the Venus flytrap. This habitat is also home to many frog species, such as the green tree frog and southern toad. However, the plants are the most abundant organisms. Along with the carnivorous plants, you can also find the smallest flowering plant in South Carolina, the duckweed. It can be found floating on the surface of the water.

Magnifying glasses – Give students magnifying glasses so they can search for frogs in the exhibit and get a closer look at the plants. Ask them if they can find the following parts of the plants: roots, stems and leaves. Ask them if they can spot the duckweed.

## 6 – Coastal Plain (Longleaf Pine Exhibit)

South Carolina is home to 38 different species of snakes. Of those 38 species, six of them are venomous: diamondback rattlesnake, timber rattlesnake, pygmy rattlesnake, copperhead, cottonmouth and coral. In most cases, venomous snakes have triangular-shaped heads in order to produce venom. The exception is the coral snake, which has an oval-shaped head. Thankfully, a coral snake's color pattern signifies that it is venomous. ("Red on black, friend of jack. Red on yellow, kill a fellow.") All snakes are important to the environment as they control rodent populations. Snakes are vertebrate and have a long flexible skeleton. A rattlesnake adds a new section to its rattle every time it sheds. However, we cannot easily determine the age of a snake based on their rattle, as it may or may not break off during the shedding process.

Snake skeleton – Use this to show the students that snakes have bones. Their bones are small and flexible to accommodate for their unique movement, known as slithering.

Snake shed – Allow students to gently touch the snake shed. Remind them that snakes shed to grow. Snakes even shed the skin that covers their eyes. You can tell a snake is about to shed when their eyes are a milky color instead of clear.

Rattlesnake rattle – Rattlesnakes create a new section to their rattle every time they shed. Part or all of the rattle can fall off.

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## 7 – Saltmarsh Aviary

The saltmarsh is one of the most productive and diverse habitats of South Carolina. Spartina grass is the dominant plant of this habitat, as it can grow well in saltwater. When the spartina grass dies in the winter, it becomes food and shelter for many animals. As it decomposes, it settles into the ground, eventually making pluff mud. Pluff mud is the cause of the distinctive smell of the saltmarsh and is a vital component of the environment. It provides stability for oysters and grasses to grow and serves as a food source for snails, worms and more. Many wading birds, such as the great blue heron and white ibis, live in the saltmarsh. They typically feed at low tide by gripping the mud with their long toes and using their beaks to forage. Other birds, such as the pelican, feed at high tide by swooping down to capture fish. Other birds commonly found in the saltmarsh include gulls and ducks.

Pluff mud scent jar – Have students smell the jar. Tell the story of the spartina grass as it transitions from a living habitat to a floating habitat, and finally decomposes to the pungent habitat of pluff mud.

Bird track pictures – Have the students find a bird in the exhibit with webbed feet, one with long toes and one with small feet. Which one is good at swimming? Which one is good at walking through the mud? Which one weighs very little, meaning it won't sink in the mud?

All of the birds in the Aquarium's Saltmarsh Aviary cannot survive in the wild. They either have eye, wing, feet or beak injuries, making it impossible for them to survive without human care.

## 8 – Coast (Camouflage Exhibit)

The octopus is known as one of the most intelligent invertebrates. It can change color and texture in an effort to blend into its environment. Though they are members of the mollusk group, they do not have a shell like other mollusks (snails, oysters, clams and squid). Their mouth, called a beak, is the only hard part of their entire body. They can maneuver through any small place as long as their beak can fit.

Octopus beak – Show the students the octopus beak. Explain how they are able to get through any space that the beak can fit through.

Octopus anatomy – Show students the octopus anatomy picture. Point out the beak as it relates to other parts of the body.

If you don't see an octopus on exhibit, there is a reason. The common octopus life span is only 1–2 years. Because of this, we don't always have one on exhibit.

## 9 – Ocean (Great Ocean Tank Exhibit)

The Aquarium's Great Ocean Tank was designed to allow fish of all sizes and swimming speeds to harmoniously live together. The large reef structure is a habitat within the tank that allows the small and medium sized fish to live within a protected environment. The open water portion of the exhibit (seen from the second-floor window and the slanted window on the first floor) is perfect for the larger and faster swimming fish. Slow swimming fish have a triangular or rounded tail (caudal) fin. Fast swimming fish have a fork-shaped tail fin. Slow swimming fish have an easier time maneuvering, or turning, because of the shape of their tail.

Stuffed animal fish – Show the students the two stuffed fish. Ask them if they know which fish is a slow swimmer and which fish is a fast swimmer by examining their tails. Explain the differences between the tails. Have the students point out a fast- swimming fish and a slow-swimming fish in the Great Ocean Tank by looking at their fin shapes.

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## 10 – Ocean (Great Ocean Tank Exhibit)

Sharks are cartilaginous fish, meaning their skeleton is comprised of cartilage rather than bones. Because of this trait, they are closely related to stingrays and skates. There are more than 400 species of sharks in the world, and 40 of them are found in South Carolina's waters. Sharks have a very unique composition — their skin is similar in touch to sandpaper, their bodies are streamlined, they have multiple rows of teeth in their mouth and they even have a sixth sense: electricity! A shark's size can range from 8 inches (in the case of the dwarf lantern shark) to upwards of 40 feet (such as the whale shark).

**Shark jaw** – Let the students examine the jaw up close so they can see the multiple rows of teeth. Explain how sharks lose a tooth and another one takes its place (like the alligator they learned about earlier). Sharks are also top predators and need their teeth for survival.

**Shark tooth** – Explain to the students how this fossil is from a megalodon shark. Though they are extinct today, megalodons are thought to be similar to the current great white shark. Because of the size of the teeth discovered, scientists estimate megalodons could have been 60 feet in length.

## 11 – Zucker Family Sea Turtle Recovery™

There are seven species of sea turtles in the world. Four are found in South Carolina's waters: loggerhead, green, Kemp's ridley and leatherback. The most common species is the loggerhead sea turtle, which is also the state reptile of South Carolina. Sea turtles face many dangers, including problems caused by human impact. The Aquarium shows visitors how we rescue, rehabilitate and release sea turtles back into the wild and teaches everyone who passes through our doors how to protect what they love.

**Loggerhead skull** – Show students the large size of the loggerhead skull. They eat hard-bodied animals, such as crabs and snails, as well as jellies and fish. Have them look at the brain cavity, and point out the size being similar to that of a walnut. Explain how this makes it difficult for turtles to tell the difference between trash and food.

**Plastic bag in a jar and jelly picture** – Ask students what is in the jar. Point out how much the plastic bag looks like a jelly and show them the picture of a jelly. Meet the turtles on exhibit and see if any of them are receiving care because they ingested plastic. One way to help sea turtles is by not littering, but ask the students what else they can do to reduce single-use plastic. (Examples: Bringing a canvas bag when shopping, using reusable cups and utensils and eliminating straw usage).

## 12 – The Shallows

Stingrays are cartilaginous fish and are closely related to sharks. There are about 220 species of stingrays in the world. Most stingrays have barbs (stingers), but not all species do. The barb is only used for defense, not for hunting. Though many people believe the barb is located at the end of the tail, it is actually located on the top towards the base. A stingray's barb can grow to 14 inches, but most species' barbs do not reach this length. Barbs have jagged edges, helpful in inflicting damage to a predator. Barbs can fall off but grow back over time.

**Stingray barb** – Show students the jagged edges on the barb. Ask them for examples of other items that have jagged edges (such as a knife). Have students try and find where the barbs are on the Aquarium's stingrays. Though we trim our stingrays' barbs for safety, you can still determine where it would be located with the help of an Aquarium educator.

# Mountains to the Sea Discovery Bin

## South Carolina Science Standards

Different standards will be covered depending on how the teacher leads the tour and what they choose to talk about. Below is a list of standards that could be covered.

K.L.2A.1	2.L.5B.2	3.L.5A.2	5.E.3B.2	6.L.4B.1	7.EC.5B.1
K.L.2A.3	2.L.5B.1	3.L.5B.1	5.E.3B.3	6.L.4B.2	7.EC.5B.3
K.L.2A.5	2.L.5B.2	3.L.5B.2	5.L.4A.1	6.L.4B.3	7.EC.5B.4
K.L.2A.6	2.L.5B.3	3.L.5B.3	5.L.4A.2	6.L.4B.5	8.E.5A.1
1.E.4A.3	2.L.5B.4	4.L.5A.1	5.L.4B.1	6.L.5B.3	8.E.6A.4
1.E.4B.2	3.E.4B.1	4.L.5B.1	5.L.4B.2	6.L.5B.4	8.E.6B.2
1.L.5A.1	3.E.4B.2	4.L.5B.2	5.L.4B.3	6.L.5B.5	H.B.6C.1
1.L.5B.2	3.E.4B.3	4.L.5B.3	5.L.4B.4	7.L.3B.2	H.B.6D.1
1.L.5B.3	3.E.4B.4	5.E.3A.1	6.L.4A.1	7.EC.5A.1	
2.L.5A.1	3.L.5A.1	5.E.3B.1	6.L.4A.2	7.EC.5A.3	