

*Enrichment is an important part of a captive animal's wellbeing. Students will explore ways to enhance the quality of life of a classroom Russian tortoise by providing a variety of stimuli. Enrichment ideas that we will discover today include food and environment manipulation.*



### Lesson Plan: **Amazing Excitement for your Classroom Pet, Russian Tortoise Enrichment**

Appropriate for grades K-2

Materials: paper and drawing utensils, recycled materials to build enrichment toys and activities, your tortoise's favorite foods

Introduction: Today we are going to talk about a big, but important word when it comes to taking care of our pet tortoise. This word is ENRICHMENT. Enrichments are ways keepers help their animals have more fun and make their days interesting. Work in pairs or small groups to talk about and draw pictures of ways that we keep our tortoise happy and interesting. *Give students 5-7 minutes to brainstorm, keep these drawings to reflect on at the conclusion of the lesson.*

In order for us to really get our pet tortoise to have fun, we need to come up with a list of things we know are true about what he likes and doesn't like. *Draw a T-chart on the board or easel with the titles LIKES and DOES NOT LIKE. These observations will help guide the student's creations because each tortoise has their own preferences. Some ideas students have given included:*

<i>LIKES</i>	<i>DOES NOT LIKE</i>
<i>Red colored foods</i>	<i>To be cold</i>
<i>To eat</i>	<i>To eat later in the day</i>
<i>To come out of his cage and walk on the carpet</i>	<i>To be held with his feet in the air</i>
<i>To climb on the ramp in his cage</i>	<i>Loud noises</i>

Now that we have recorded our observations about what our tortoise does and does not like, how can we use these to help enrich his life? *Guide student's answers to make the connection that the enrichment ideas and materials should associate directly with your tortoise's likes.*

Introduce materials: Today I have brought in a variety of materials for you and your friends to create fun obstacles and games for our tortoise to engage in. I have also brought in some of our tortoises' favorite foods like cherry tomatoes, mustard greens and an extra special treat, watermelon. *Split students into small groups and have them start brainstorming ways to use the materials. They may choose to draw pictures or sketch out their enrichment toys before actually creating. Students should ask the teacher before using food to include in their creation, especially if it is fruit. Tortoises should have a very limited amount of fruit.*

*Place your tortoise in a floor pen or enclosed area where students can leave their enrichment toy and make observations about the effectiveness and desirability. If you are worried your students will become bored, consider having them create an observation journal where they draw or write what they see the tortoise doing. What behaviors does he display and how are these different than when he is in his cage?*

Reflection/ discussion: Gather students back together and have students pair up with new partners. What did we notice about our enrichment toys? What activities did our tortoise like best? Why do we think this? How are the behaviors we observed different than what we would observe in his cage?

Now that students have had experience planning, building and observation enrichment activities, hand back the drawings from the beginning of the lesson. Have the class add new ideas to their paper and consider allowing students to continue to create enrichment toys during recess or at home.

Enrichment should be introduced into your tortoise's day and can be simple or elaborate. Consider having your students explore a variety of different stimuli such as:

- Adding ramps or other additions to your tortoise cage
- Hang bundles of food from the top of the cage to encourage stretching and moving
- Hide foods in unusual places
- Plant patches of grass in low containers and allow the tortoise to graze
- Consider adding a second story to your habitat
- Make hills and valleys for the tortoise to climb
- Add roll-able, but safe, toys inside the habitat
- Take your tortoise outside in favorable weather

Happy creating!

Loni Butlin  
QUEST Elementary School  
Hilton, New York

Pictures of a kindergarten-aged girl making her own ramp to encourage the Russian tortoise to climb:

