

## Odyssey's Lake Jocassee Nature Expedition



Odyssey, the blue-furred otter with his signature sunglasses, was eager to lead a group of kids from a local school on an exciting nature tour around Lake Jocassee. As the students arrived on their pontoon boat, Odyssey dove into the crystal-clear water to greet them.

"Welcome to Lake Jocassee!" chirped Odyssey as he climbed aboard. "Today, we're going to explore the amazing plants and animals that call this place home."

As they cruised along the shoreline, Odyssey pointed out some of the local plants. "See those tall trees with needle-like leaves? Those are Eastern Hemlocks. And those colorful flowers near the water? Those are Cardinal Flowers."

"Wow!" exclaimed Sarah, one of the students. "I've never seen so many different plants in one place!"

Odyssey nodded enthusiastically. "Lake Jocassee is special because it has such a diverse ecosystem. Now, let's talk about the animals we might see."

He explained that animals can be divided into two main groups: vertebrates (animals with backbones) and invertebrates (animals without backbones). "There are five groups of vertebrates," Odyssey continued. "Can anyone name them?"

The students thought hard. "Fish!" shouted Tommy. "Birds!" added Emma. "Mammals!" called out Luis. "Great job!" Odyssey praised.

"The other two are reptiles and amphibians. We have examples of all five groups here at Lake Jocassee." Just then, a fish jumped out of the water. "That's a Brook Trout," Odyssey explained. "And look over there - see that turtle basking on the log? That's a Slider, which is a reptile."

As if on cue, a Great Blue Heron swooped down to the water's edge. "There's our bird example!" Odyssey exclaimed. "And of course, I'm a mammal."

Can anyone spot an amphibian?" The students scanned the shoreline until Maria pointed excitedly. "There! Is that a salamander?" "Good eye, Maria!" Odyssey confirmed. "That's a Blue Ridge Two-lined Salamander."

As they continued their tour, Odyssey directed their attention to a beautiful waterfall cascading down the rocky cliffs. "This waterfall is constantly shaping the land around it," he explained. "The force of the water erodes the rock over time, carrying tiny particles downstream." "What happens to those particles?" asked Luis.

"Great question!" Odyssey replied. "As the water slows down, it deposits these particles in other areas. This process of erosion and deposition is constantly changing the shape of the lake and its surroundings."

The teacher, Mr. Johnson, added, "That's right, Odyssey. In fact, this entire lake is a human-made landform. It was created by flooding the Jocassee Valley in 1973."

The students were amazed. "You mean there used to be a valley here?" Sarah asked incredulously. Odyssey nodded. "Yes, and the flooding changed the entire ecosystem. Some land animals had to move, while new habitats were created for aquatic species like me!"

As they neared the end of their tour, Odyssey reminded the students about the importance of conservation. "Lake Jocassee is home to many unique plants and animals. It's up to all of us to protect this special place."

The students nodded in agreement, their minds full of new knowledge about the diverse life and ever-changing landscape of Lake Jocassee.

As the pontoon boat docked, the students thanked Odyssey for the incredible tour. Odyssey waved goodbye with his webbed paw, diving back into the clear waters of Lake Jocassee, ready for his next adventure.