

# INSPIRING EMPATHY THROUGH PLAYFUL CONNECTIONS WITH ZOO ANIMALS

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# OBJECTIVE 1

**Engage** stakeholders and staff to inform design of play space and interactive educational content for signage.

- Where should the play space be located?
- What should the theme be?
- How can a play space promote empathy for animals?
  - Perspective taking
  - Emotional sharing
  - Feelings identification





# **DECIDING FACTORS**

**Survey Results**  
**Playground Safety**  
**Exhibit Fundraising**

# OBJECTIVE 2

**Partner** with contractors who align with our values to build play spaces.

## Considerations

- Timeline
- Safety/insurance
- Maintenance
- Staff oversight
- Budget
- Parallel Play



# How can our play space promote empathy for red pandas?

## Perspective taking

- What do these animals do?
- How do they behave? Why?
- What special adaptations do they have?
- How does this compare to how children play?



## Play Like a Panda!



### Wrist vs. Thumb

Red pandas have flexible ankles and special wrist bones that help them climb down trees headfirst.



What part of your hand helps you hold on to the swing?

## Play Like a Panda!



### Paws vs. Shoes

The bottoms of a red panda's feet are covered in fur so they don't slip while climbing on wet branches.



What do your shoes have on the bottom that prevents you from slipping?

## Play Like a Panda!



### Tail vs. Arms

Red pandas balance by holding their long tails straight behind them while walking across a log.



What body parts do you use to balance while walking across the log?

## Play Like a Panda!



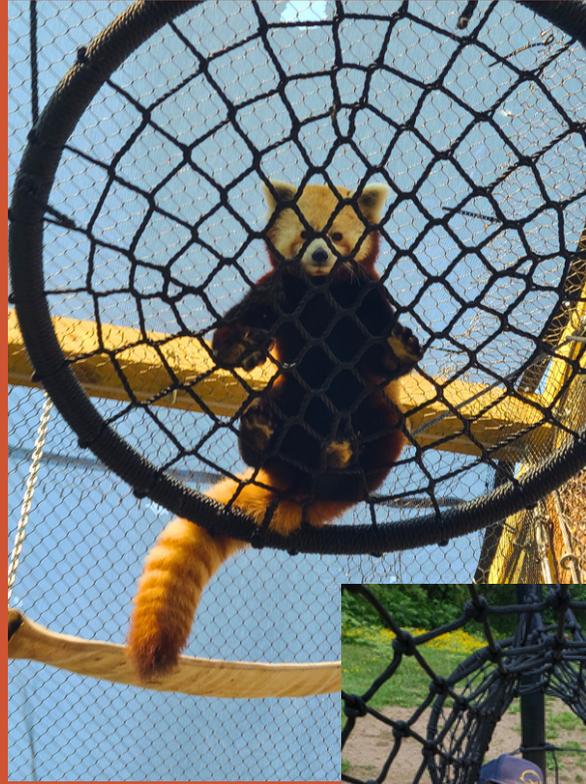
### Red vs. Green

A red and white fur coat helps red pandas hide in the red moss and white lichen found on the fir trees where they live.



What color camouflage clothing do we wear in the Midwest?





**How can our play space  
promote empathy for red  
pandas?**

**Feelings identification and  
emotional sharing**

- How is this animal feeling?
- Why do you think it feels that way?
- Do you ever feel like that?





It's finally here! 🐼



## Saving Red Pandas

Red panda populations have declined by about 50% in the last 20 years.

### Threats

**Slow Reproductive Rate**  
Red pandas don't reach sexual maturity until 18 months. This is a slow rate for a small mammal.

**Habitat Loss**  
Red pandas have fewer places to live because of logging, demand for firewood, and clearing forests for farming.

**Illegal Exotic Pet Trade**  
Red pandas are cute, but it is illegal to keep one as a pet. They require a specialized diet (bamboo leaves), specialized veterinary care, and lots of space to explore.

### How We Can Help

Like Superior Zoo participates in the **Red Panda Species Survival Plan (SSP)**. SSP programs allow zoos to cooperatively manage the breeding of a species to ensure the gene pool stays diverse and the population remains stable. Your zoo ticket or membership purchase helps support this program.



Local people called **Forest Guardians** monitor habitat and recommend consider development to allow red pandas to travel between bamboo forests. You can look for the **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)** label when you buy wood or paper products. This label means your purchase didn't cost a panda its home.



**The Red Panda Network** provides education to reduce the number of people who want red pandas as pets, and investigates and exposes the people and organizations that capture them for sale. You can support their conservation efforts by donating to [RedPandaNetwork.org](http://RedPandaNetwork.org).



## How Do They Compare?



### Red Panda

**Diet** Red pandas mostly eat bamboo leaves.



**Range** Red pandas live in Himalayan mountain forests of Asia.

As few as 2,500 red pandas are left in the wild.



### Giant Panda

**Diet** Giant pandas mostly eat bamboo shoots and leaves.



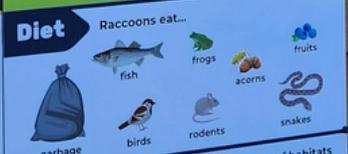
**Range** Giant pandas live in the mountain forests of China.

As few as 1,860 giant pandas are left in the wild.

Red pandas are not related to giant pandas.



### Raccoon



**Range** Raccoons live in a variety of habitats across North America.

They were introduced to Europe, Japan, and Southern Russia.

Red pandas are not related to raccoons.

# OBJECTIVE 3

**Implement** the play spaces with guests and students, and **collect** observational evaluation data on the effectiveness of the spaces for fostering empathy.

## OBSERVATIONS OF GUESTS

- Adults reading signs and helping children engage in play and identify Zoozee's feelings.
- Fewer observations of children saying how **they** are feeling.

“Her swing looks like the one you have at home!”

“The red panda is playing!”

“Look at the play area - it has the same toys as in here!”

“I wish I could take a nap every two to three hours!”

## BENEFITS TO PRESCHOOL STUDENTS

“Many days in the fall we would eat in the sunshine at Zoozee's, which provided a great place to enjoy our snack, and then the children that were done could transition into play.”





***“The playground provides challenges that children can grow their skills and confidence to prepare for adventures in the forest.”***





# CHALLENGES

Staff turnover

Budget limitations

Guest expectations

Wheel complications

Time to observe/evaluate







# THANK YOU!

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ACCREDITED BY THE  
**ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS**



ADVANCING  
CONSERVATION  
THROUGH  
**EMPATHY FOR  
WILDLIFE**