

University of Arizona - Insect Discovery: ADAPTATION/CAMOUFLAGE ACTIVITY

Goal: Give children a clear understanding of the concept of adaptation. The activity will focus on how insects use coloration, shape and sometimes behavior to hide from predators (or even prey!). .

PART 1 Camouflage Game (small group or partner activity)

Materials:

- colored and plain metal paper clips
- forceps
- paper cups
- aluminum foil

Rather than explaining about camouflage and adaptation, tell the kids they are going to play a game in which they pretend to be birds eating insects. They each hold a pair of forceps (the beak) and must gather as many paper clips (insects) as they can in 10 seconds. Give each child a pair of forceps and a plate of paper clips. Tell them to pick up clips and put them in the hand. When the time is up, have the kids put down their forceps and lay out the paper clips collected, sorting them into silver and colored. Ideally, they will have collected more of the contrasting (colored) clips and fewer camouflaged ones. Discuss why it was easier to find the contrasting color paper clips. Try to move them beyond the literal world of paper clips to the world of insects and discuss a real insect you might see in a real habitat. Introduce the word adaptation and get across the idea that particular insects are adapted to particular environments.

PART 2 Counting crickets (demonstration activity)

Materials

- live crickets (available at most pet stores)
- two clear container for cages
- natural and colored rocks or sand

Set up two different cages of crickets, one with blue rocks and one with naturally colored rocks (various shades of brown). Place an equal number of crickets in each cage. Place the cages in front of the children. Ask one group of kids to count the crickets in the cage with blue rocks while the other groups count the crickets in the cage with natural colored rocks. Then have the groups switch cages. Which cage was easier to count and why? (Both rocks and crickets are available at most pet stores.)

PART 3 Camouflaged Insect Pictures (whole class or small groups)

There are many excellent websites with pictures of camouflaged insects that can be printed and shown to the students. Some examples are:

<http://oncampus.richmond.edu/academics/education/projects/webunits/adaptations/camou1.html>

http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/rt_room/sparkers/camouflage/camouflage.html

<http://waynesword.palomar.edu/lmexe10b.htm>