

I SPY, DESCRIBING INSECTS

Project Skills:

- Learners will identify physical and behavioral characteristics of insects.

Life Skills:

- Learning to learn

Academic Standards:

- Science C.4.2 Use the science content being learned to ask questions, plan investigations, make observations, make predictions, and offer explanations.

Grade Level: 3

Time: 60 minutes

Supplies Needed:

Cricket House Activity

- Knee-high stockings
- Live insects
- Milk cartons
- Scissors
- Stapler

Insect Observations Activity

- *I'm as Quick as a Cricket* by Audrey Wood
- Hand lens or dissecting scopes
- Live insects
- Pinned insects

BACKGROUND

Crickets have long played a role in the lives of people around the world. In America, an “old-fashioned” method of estimating the temperature involved counting cricket sounds. Crickets chirp faster in warm weather, so someone figured out that if you add 39 to the number of cricket chirps you count in 15 seconds, you will have an estimate of the temperature, in degrees Fahrenheit.

In some Asian homes, crickets are kept as pets. These chirpy critters are considered good luck. They are often kept in elaborately carved Cricket Houses.

Today, youth will make a cricket house, and observe and describe insects.

WHAT TO DO

Activity: Cricket House

Procedure:

1. Clean a small ½ pint milk carton thoroughly.
2. Cut holes in at least two sides for windows.
3. Staple top closed.
4. Cover milk carton with intact panty hose (knee-highs, in a light shade, are best).
5. Put insect to be observed in the Cricket House.
6. Tie top of panty hose.



Insects for observation can be purchased, or captured in the wild. Native wild insects should be kept for no longer than 24 hours and then released. If you want to use crickets, you can purchase feeder crickets from pet stores. Purchased insects should never be released into the wild.

A little sand on the bottom of the carton with some grass and other vegetation will make the house more suitable for the insect. If you are housing crickets, they will eat tiny bits of vegetables.

Activity: Insect Observation and “Quick as a Cricket”

Have learners observe their insect for several minutes. Suggest to them that they look for the physical characteristics of insects that they have already learned (three body parts and six legs). Ask them to look for any additional features on the body of their insects, such as antennae, wings, etc. Remind them to focus on *physical characteristics* (what the animal looks like), e.g., color, shape, body features.

When several minutes have passed, have the group share their observations of physical characteristics.

In preparation for the book, *I'm as Quick as a Cricket*, talk with the children about *behavioral characteristics* and how we can use words to describe those characteristics. Have the children listen for words that describe behavioral characteristics as you read the story. After the story, ask the children to share the words that they heard.

Now have the learners observe their insects again, this time observing behavioral characteristics. Is their insect quick like a cricket, or perhaps it is as buzzy as a bee? Maybe it is a very slow-moving insect – as lazy as a lion? After the observation period, gather the group to compare their observations.

Sources:

- Created by Paula Rogers Huff, 4-H Youth Development Agent, UW-Extension, Oconto County
- Design for insect house from Roseanne Hahn, member of the Wisconsin 4-H Curriculum Committee

TALK IT OVER**Reflect:**

- What did you notice about how your insect looked (physical characteristics)?
- What did you notice about how your insect acted (behavioral characteristics)?
- Which was easier for you – noticing how the insect looked or how it acted? What made it easier for you?

Apply:

- What things were the same about all the insects?
- What differences did you notice?
- Why do you think our observations differed from person to person?

ENHANCE/SIMPLIFY

- Create a group chart of characteristics observed. Distinguish between physical characteristics and behavioral characteristics.
- If weather permits, take youth outside so that they can capture their own insects to put in their insect houses. Instruct the youth not to capture any bees because of the possibility of stings.

Reviewed by Wisconsin 4-H Afterschool Team: September 2004.