

Incredible Insect Mouths

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This lesson shows children that insects have different kinds of mouths. It also notes the kinds of foods that different insects eat. It is a hands-on experiment type of lesson in which the children act as insects and use different tools for their “mouths.”

Teacher planning

Time required for lesson
45 minutes

Materials/resources

- pictures of insects with the different kinds of mouths
- nutcrackers (one per group)
- paper towel or sponge piece (one per student)
- turkey baster (one per group)
- straws (one per student)
- cookies
- juice
- cups
- colored water in cup/bowl
- paper
- crayons/markers

Technology resources

Children can use the internet to locate insect pictures and see what kinds of mouths the insects have as a follow up to this activity.

Pre-activities

Students should have an understanding of characteristics of insects. They should have a discussion at the beginning of the lesson about what kinds of food insects eat so they can understand how the mouth types help the different insects.

Activities

The teacher will introduce the lesson with a review of things that the students have already learned about insects. Then the teacher will address the class with the question of what insects eat. After recording some of the children’s answers the teacher will tell them that they are going to find out how different insects use their mouths to eat. (The materials should already be on hand for quick distribution.)

The teacher will hold up a picture of an insect with the first type of mouth. The picture should be of a beetle or similar insect with a tweezers/pliers mouth. Demonstrate how an insect with this kind of mouth would eat using the tweezers/pliers and a cookie. Then the children will be told to use their nutcracker and cookie to “tear” the cookie apart like a beetle would with his mouth. Pause for each child at the table to try this with the tweezers/pliers.

The next mouth to explore will be a needle mouth. Use a picture of a mosquito to show the children a needle mouth. Demonstrate using the baster to soak up colored water from a cup. Allow time for the children to do this as well.

The third type of mouth is a sponge mouth. Use a picture of a fly to show a sponge mouth. Demonstrate using a paper towel or a sponge clipped with a clothespin and water how the water soaks up into the sponge much like the food soaks into the fly's mouth. Allow the children to use their materials to explore the sponge mouth.

Finally, complete the lesson with the last mouth, the straw mouth. Use a picture of a butterfly to show this type of mouth. Use a straw to suck juice up out of a cup to show how a butterfly eats. Allow the children to use their straws and juice.

Follow up this activity by having the children draw their favorite insect, showing its mouth and indicating what kind of mouth the insect has: straw, needle, pliers, or sponge.

Assessment

The children should be able to respond to verbal questions about the types of mouths and should be able to name the four types of mouths and indicate an insect that has each type of mouth. More advanced students may want to get on the internet and find different insects with each type of mouth.

Supplemental information

Some good insect books are:

Insect by Laurence Mound

Wings, Stings, and Wiggly Things by Martin Jenkins

Bugs by Heather Amery and Jane Songi

Simon and Schuster Children's Guide to Insects and Spiders by Jinny Johnson