



Camouflaging caterpillars

Age: 7-14

Topic: Biology and Maths

Time: 1 hour



What should learners already know?

- Pollinators have a four-stage life cycle.
- Caterpillars are the larvae of butterflies or moths.
- Caterpillars are important parts of many ecosystems.

What equipment will I need?

- Different lengths of coloured wool, including green
- A varied open space
- A timer (optional)

How will learners explore this?

1. Split the class into two groups.
2. Let each child take a number of 'caterpillars' (lengths of wool) that they will hide.
3. Each group should hide their 'caterpillars' in different areas of the green space you are working in.
4. Call the two groups back to the centre and explain to the class that each child has now become a hungry bird looking for caterpillars to eat.
5. The two groups need to swap areas. Give them five minutes to find as many 'caterpillars' as they can and bring them back to the group.
6. Discuss with children why some caterpillars were easier to find than others.
7. Extension: This exercise can link well to maths topics (division, fractions, and averages). The mean, median, and mode caterpillars collected by each group could be investigated. The proportion of caterpillars of different colours collected, or the proportion of caterpillars collected compared to those placed in the environment, could be calculated.



Did you know:

Keep an eye out for holes in the middle and edges of leaves – these are signs of caterpillar activity!

How can we show the learning?

- Why were some caterpillars easier to find than others? Was the colour of caterpillars more important than where they were placed? Challenge children by asking them to explain why camouflage is so important to prey species.
- What methods did children use to find caterpillars? How might this be similar or different to the methods that birds use to find caterpillars to eat?
- How efficient was the class at finding caterpillars? How many of the caterpillars that were hidden in the environment did children find?
- Extension activity: Use only short lengths of green string, and hide them along a hedgerow. Encourage the class to quietly walk along the hedgerow and see how many green strings they can spot. This is to simulate fully camouflaged caterpillars. Are the green strings more difficult to find than the colourful strings?
- This activity can also be a good context for number processing work. A single blue tit chick can eat up to 100 caterpillars per day. A blue tit brood can have as many as 10 chicks, so the mother and father blue tit will need to find 500 caterpillars to feed all their chicks every day. Blue tits can take up to 20 days to fledge (grow up and leave the nest), so that equates to 20,000 caterpillars by the end. This is before the parents have even fed themselves!



Did you know:

Some caterpillar species can grow up to 14 centimetres in length.

