

K-2 Life Science

Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program

What is an insect?



INTRODUCTION

Insects are the largest group of animals in the world. Some are essential for the life on the planet. They pollinate flowers, eat crop pests, build soil, and recycle plant and animal waste. Insects are also an important food source for birds, fish and many other animals. Our world would be a very different place without insects!

WHERE'S THE SCIENCE?

An insect is a small animal that has six legs, three body parts: a **head** (front), **thorax** (middle), and **abdomen** (end), and one pair of **antenna** (feelers). Attached to the head are the antennae, which the insect uses to smell and touch, and **mouthparts** to eat with. Some insects have mouthparts for sucking liquids (butterflies, and moths) while others have mouthparts for chewing (grasshoppers and beetles). All insects have six legs that are segmented (jointed) and have a little claw at the end. Many also have wings. Legs and wings are always attached to the thorax.

All insects begin their life cycle as a tiny egg. Some insects grow into adults in three stages: egg, young (**nymph**) and adult. The young insects shed their skins as they grow. This is called **molting**. Grasshoppers and milkweed bugs have this kind of life cycle, also known as **simple metamorphosis**. Most insects go through a dramatic change from egg to adult, in four stages: egg, **larvae**, **pupa**, and adult. This type of life cycle is called **complete metamorphosis**.

MATERIALS

- Photograph of an insect or model
- Science notebooks one per student
- Small plastic baggies, one per student with the following items:
 - Hand lens
 - Golf scoring pencil
 - Craft stick

PROCEDURES

1. Ask: What is an insect? Chart responses
2. Using an insect model or photograph, point out the main features of insects:
 - Three part body, head, thorax and abdomen
 - Six legs
 - Antennas

3. Talk the children on a walk outdoors to look for insects. Discuss where they might want to look for insects.
4. Give each child a science notebook and materials bag.
5. During the walk stop and point out various animals. Remind children of the structure of an insect. If students see an insect ask them draw it in their science notebook.
6. Back in class review the different kinds of insects that were found and where. Chart.

Extension Activity:

1. Make small blank books by stapling four or five sheets of paper together.
2. Write “My Insect Book” on the cover.
3. Have students make their own insects books.
4. Ask students to draw a picture of an insect on each page.
5. Students can then research their insects and write about them.

Additional Resources

<http://www.insecta-inspecta.com/>

<http://www.yucky.com/>

Nevada State Standards

L.2.B Students understand that living things have identifiable characteristics.