

SURPRISE TERRARIUM

OBJECTIVES

Students will: 1) identify camouflage as an example of adaptation in an animal; and 2) describe the importance of adaptation to animals.

METHOD

Students observe a live animal that uses camouflage techniques.

BACKGROUND

NOTE: See "Thicket Game" and "Seeing is Believing."

One of the most important ways that living things survive is by their ability to adapt—to climate, soils, water, vegetation, other life forms and other ecological factors.

Animals that use camouflage techniques can be particularly interesting and visually compelling to young students as a means of illustrating the concept of adaptation.

The major purpose of this activity is for students to recognize that animals are adapted to survive.

MATERIALS

terrarium with vegetation and one animal suited to the kind of habitat components represented in the terrarium (the animal should be one that uses camouflage as a form of adaptation to survive; e.g., leaf hopper, tree frog, tree lizard, walking stick, grasshopper, earthworm); photos of animals using camouflage or magazines the students can use to find photos

Age: Grades K-3 (and older)
Subjects: Science, Language Arts
Skills: application, discussion, generalization, observation
Duration: 20-30 minutes
Group Size: any
Setting: indoors
Conceptual Framework Reference: III.D., III.D.1., III.D.2.
Key Vocabulary: adaptation, camouflage
Appendices: Animals in the Classroom, Field Ethics

NOTE: See the National Science Teachers Association's *Guidelines for Responsible Use of Animals in the Classroom* in the Appendices for suggestions concerning proper housing and care for animals in the classroom.

PROCEDURE

1. Make a "surprise terrarium" for your students, and bring it to class. The terrarium should contain an animal that is hard for the students to see at first because the animal uses camouflage as an adaptation technique.
2. Encourage the students to observe the terrarium and wonder if an animal might live there. Ask them to describe what they see.
3. Ask the students to think of animals that blend with their environments. Talk about their ideas. Show photos or bring in magazines and ask the students to look for pictures of animals that look so much like where they live they are hard to see. Are the animals camouflaged? Camouflage is one way animals are adapted in order to survive.
4. If they haven't found the animal that is living in their terrarium, encourage them to look very closely until they do.
5. Ask the students to summarize some of the things they have learned about "adaptation" and its importance to animals.
6. If the camouflaged animal was brought into the classroom from the wild, the students should participate in the process of returning the animal to its natural home. This is a good time to talk about human responsibilities for proper care of animals used for instructional purposes as well as a potential way to see the animal camouflaged in its natural setting.

EVALUATION

1. Name two animals that use camouflage, and talk about how camouflage is important to these animals.
2. Pick a photograph of one kind of habitat from a selection of images your teacher provides. Draw an animal that would be camouflaged in the habitat you pick.