Activity 23:

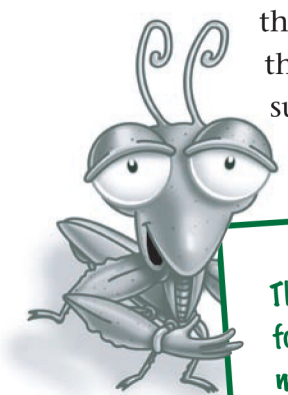
The Great Cover Up

Objective: Experience the effectiveness of how insect use camouflage

Time: 30 Minutes

Materials: Insect Templates pages (in appendix), paper and crayons and/or markers

Before the activity, copy and cut the insect templates and color them using those colors and/or patterns around you. For example, color in one of the insects similar to the color of a chalkboard, another to have a wood-grain look similar to a desk top or coat rack, another that is the color of a countertop, etc. Before the students come in, tape the insects to the various surfaces that they match.



This activity can be adapted for outdoors using natural materials (leaves, grass, soil) as the insect templates are being camouflaged.

To introduce the following discussion, you might want to wear army fatigue-type clothes such as camouflage pants or t-shirt, if available, to stimulate gardeners' interest.

Lead students in a conversation about the concept of camouflage. Ask them what they think camouflage is. They may have heard the term before in reference to camouflage clothing worn by members of the military. Ask students what camouflage clothing looks like. What is its purpose? Through discussion, make sure that students know that the purpose of camouflage clothing is to conceal the person wearing it. Camouflage is a type of disguise that hides people (or animals) by helping them blend in with their surroundings. In addition to people in the military, many animals and plants use camouflage either to allow them to sneak up on their prey, or to hide from a predator.

Tell students that, before they came in, you placed some insect shapes around the room. Let them know how many there are. Ask them to pretend that they are hungry predators looking for a juicy insect snack. Keep track of the time it takes for them to find all of the insects. Afterwards, discuss camouflage again. Were the insects well hidden?

How long did it take to find all of the shapes? If the insects had been real and the students real predators, which ones would have been caught and eaten first? What advantage is there in being well camouflaged? Explain that insects have adapted over time to be able to hide and protect themselves from predators and to to conceal themselves from their prey.

Some insects use **reverse-camouflage**. That is, they are brightly colored so they stand out rather than hide. Usually, these insects taste bad or are toxic, and the bright colors serve as a **"DO NOT EAT!"** warning to other animals. Other insects use bright colors to disguise themselves as a toxic or bad-tasting insect. This technique of imitation is called **mimicry**. Pretty tricky, huh?

Take the group for a nature walk and challenge them to find four examples of camouflaged insects. Remind them of safety rules and to not actually touch the insects but instead point it out to others. There are likely many insects students will look past, as they are doing a very good job of hiding in plain sight. For photos of some of the most effectively camouflaged insects, visit the links at:
www.jmgkids.us/wildlifegardener

Name _____ Date _____

Insect Templates