

Photo Description



A colorful caterpillar with black, white, and yellow stripes crawls on a rock. The caterpillar has two black parts sticking out from its head. Green leaves are in the background.

Scientific Phenomena

This image shows the larval stage of metamorphosis - specifically a monarch butterfly caterpillar in its growth phase. The caterpillar is demonstrating several key biological processes: it's actively feeding and growing, preparing for one of nature's most remarkable transformations. The distinctive black, white, and yellow striping serves as warning coloration (aposematism) to predators, indicating the caterpillar contains toxins from the milkweed plants it consumes. This is an excellent anchoring phenomenon because students can observe a living organism in the process of dramatic change, making abstract concepts like growth and development concrete and visible.

Core Science Concepts

1. Life Cycles and Growth: All living things grow and change over time through predictable stages
2. Animal Needs: Living things need food, water, air, and shelter to survive and grow
3. Animal Behaviors: Animals have body parts that help them survive (the caterpillar's stripes warn predators)
4. Patterns in Nature: The regular striping pattern shows how nature creates repeating designs

Pedagogical Tip:

Use this image to introduce the concept that "baby" animals often look very different from their parents. This prepares students for understanding that caterpillars and butterflies are the same animal at different life stages.

UDL Suggestions:

Provide tactile experiences alongside the visual by having students feel different textures (soft fabric for caterpillar, smooth paper for chrysalis, delicate tissue paper for butterfly wings) while discussing each life stage.

Zoom In / Zoom Out

1. Zoom In: Inside the caterpillar's body, special groups of cells called "imaginal discs" are waiting to become butterfly parts like wings, legs, and antennae during metamorphosis. The caterpillar is also digesting toxic chemicals from milkweed that make it poisonous to birds.
2. Zoom Out: This caterpillar is part of a larger ecosystem where it serves as both predator (eating plants) and potential prey (food for birds and spiders). Monarch caterpillars are also part of an incredible continental migration pattern that spans multiple generations across North America.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you notice about the caterpillar's colors and patterns? (Bloom's: Observe | DOK: 1)
2. Why do you think the caterpillar has such bright stripes? (Bloom's: Analyze | DOK: 2)
3. What do you think this caterpillar needs to grow bigger and stronger? (Bloom's: Apply | DOK: 2)
4. How might this caterpillar be different from the butterfly it will become? (Bloom's: Compare | DOK: 3)

Potential Student Misconceptions

1. Misconception: "The caterpillar turns into a butterfly by growing wings on the outside"
Clarification: The caterpillar completely rebuilds its body from the inside during metamorphosis
2. Misconception: "All caterpillars become the same kind of butterfly"
Clarification: Different caterpillars become different types of butterflies or moths
3. Misconception: "Caterpillars are baby butterflies like puppies are baby dogs"
Clarification: Caterpillars are a completely different life stage, not just smaller versions of butterflies

NGSS Connections

- Performance Expectation: K-LS1-1 - Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals need to survive
- Disciplinary Core Ideas: K-LS1.C - Organization for Matter and Energy Flow in Organisms
- Crosscutting Concepts: Patterns and Structure and Function

Science Vocabulary

- * Caterpillar: The worm-like stage of a butterfly's life when it eats and grows
- * Larva: The scientific name for a young animal that looks different from its parents
- * Metamorphosis: The amazing change when a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly
- * Pattern: Colors, shapes, or designs that repeat in a regular way
- * Predator: An animal that hunts and eats other animals
- * Stripes: Lines of different colors that go across something

External Resources

Children's Books:

- The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
- From Caterpillar to Butterfly by Deborah Heiligman
- Waiting for Wings by Lois Ehlert

YouTube Videos:

- "Monarch Butterfly Life Cycle" by National Geographic Kids - Shows real footage of metamorphosis stages (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IU2sYz6Uew>)
- "Caterpillar Shoes" by StoryBots - Fun, educational song about caterpillars and butterflies (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75NQK-Sm1YY>)