

Feather Fantastic



Objective

Students will be able to recognize that all birds have feathers, and state two ways feathers help birds.

Materials

Per student:

- Feather Fantastic** craft pattern
- 10 or more feathers (available at craft stores)
- glue
- crayons

For class:

- pictures of various animals including but not limited to a bird, a horse, a frog, a cat or dog, a bee or butterfly, and a fish

Background

One characteristic sets birds apart from all other animals—feathers. Feathers are made of keratin, a substance similar to your fingernails. Birds grow feathers like we grow hair.

Birds have different kinds of feathers. Soft, unstructured feathers are called down feathers. Down feathers are close to the body and help trap heat. Stiffer feathers with a shaft and vane are called contour feathers. Contour feathers cover down feathers, help shape a bird's body, and, on the wing, are specialized flight feathers.

Some birds have modified feathers for special needs. Penguins have short, stubby, overlapping feathers that keep cold ocean water away from their skin. Male peacocks have long, elaborate tail feathers that help attract attention from females. Cockatoos have bright head feathers they raise when excited.

People have used feathers in many different ways. In the past they have been used as pen quills, hat or dress decorations, fans, masks, and arrows. Today, we still use eider down to stuff pillows and quilts, feathers for fishing lures, and peacock tail feathers as toys for cats.

Action

1. Begin a class discussion by showing the pictures of the various animals. Can students name them? Can students say where they live (land, water, farm, house, etc.)?
2. Ask students "What does a bird have that the other animals do not?" (feathers).
3. Distribute the Feather Fantastic funsheet. Identify the bird on the funsheet (a generic dove) and find its eye, beak, legs, wings, tail. If students can write, copy these words on the paper.
4. Hand out crayons and have students color their birds.
5. Hand out feathers to students. Take time to feel the feathers. Are some stiff while others are soft? Soft feathers are down feathers and keep birds warm. Stiffer feathers are contour feathers and provide body shape. Long stiff feathers on the wing help birds fly.
6. Distribute glue and have students glue feathers on their birds.
7. Post the students' finished projects on the class bulletin board or around the room.

