



Seed Dispersal Socks

Background Information:

Animals help plants spread their seed in a variety of ways. Birds often consume fruit, passing the seeds undisturbed through their digestive system and later depositing them on new terrain. Ants carry the seeds of many wildflowers into their underground burrows, where they consume the fatty tidbits attached to the seeds - called elaiosomes – but and then discard the seeds, which later germinate. Many squirrels and rodents create larders of seeds, some of which they don't eat. Lastly, seeds often get stuck in fur when an animal brushes against a plant, and they are carried for a while before they fall off.

Materials:

- Old socks
- Masking tape
- A field or grassy area with seed-bearing plants

Activity:

1. Put old socks on, and affix masking tape – stick side out – on socks. One piece of tape around the foot and one around the ankle works well.
2. Go for a walk in a grassy area.
3. After walking, take off socks and examine them carefully. What is attached to the socks? Seeds? Other organic bits?
4. Discuss how different animals' fur might be similar to their socks. How does the process of seed dispersal by animals help plants? Why is it important?

