Site Insect Study

guidelines for free exploration

Background about insects is helpful but not necessary for students. Ask the students to define an insect and discuss some examples of insects. Ask students what insects they think will be present in this environment.
If students did not do the pre-visit activity, read the "Getting Bugged" activity, and have a discussion now with the students about what an insect is.

Have the following materials available if possible:

- insect identification books or photocopied guide of common insects,
- sweep nets and plastic bags to contain the bugs and debris that is swept up,
- collection boxes,
- magnifying glasses,
- cutting knife for gall exploration,
- student journals

Have a site marked out that will contain ample findings of insects. Discuss with students the many places that insects can be found in a natural setting:

- decaying matter
- around plants, flowers, weeds
- in old tree stumps
- in old tree bark
- in the leaves of trees
- in the sap of trees
- under dead leaves, especially wet ones

If sweep nets are available, demonstrate how to use them, or do the sweep yourself and allow the students to investigate the plastic bag into which debris has been captured. Instruct students to put one insect into each collection box for better identification.

Instruct the students that insects can be found in other places that are not obvious. The students will have to be "insect detectives" and look for signs that could indicate that insects are present:

- galls: cut them open to discover larva
- leafminers: these insects develop inside a
- leaf-rollers: these insects roll leaves into "homes"
- paper nests: about the size of a football; they indicate hornets....just look!
- mud nests: usually found on rock outcroppings and indicate wasps....again, just look!
- ground nests: yellow-jackets and bumble bees dig burrows into the ground
- bark tunnels: when bark is stripped from logs into tunnels, it usually means bark beetles are present

Establish a "meeting" place for students to come back and check out insects they have found. I.D. books, magnifying glasses, etc., could be available at this site.

Gather the group together to discuss the differences between the insects found at the school site and the insects found at the field trip site. If time allows, students could draw their favorite insect, write about the search in their journals. Approximately 30 minutes should be allowed for this exploration.