

Home Is Where The Grass Is



Objective

Students will learn the coloration and habitat of manatees and how manatees are camouflaged to blend into their environment.

Materials

For each student group:

- wide-mouth pint jar
- white construction paper manatees (see pattern on page 3) enlarged 200%
- 12" x 18" sheets of white construction paper
- cups of black paintwash (two tsp. of black paint per five oz. of water)
- ten strips of blue tissue paper per student
- ten strips of green tissue paper per student
- cups of gluewash (one tsp. of glue per five oz. of water)
- paintbrushes
- newspaper

Background

Manatees are mammals that live in warm, fresh water and seawater. The West Indian manatee found in Florida waters can weigh up to 545 kg (1,200 lb.) and reach 3.1 m (10 ft.) They usually swim slowly or float at the surface. To feed, they make shallow dives of not more than 10 m (33 ft.) to grab aquatic plants including manatee grass, turtle grass, water hydrilla, mangrove leaves, and water hyacinth. All manatees are herbivores (plant eaters.) An adult manatee may eat four to nine percent of its body weight, between 22 to 50 kg (48-108 lb.) each day.



Action

1. Hand out copies of the white construction paper manatees and have the students cut them out. You may need to cut out the manatee for younger students.
2. Spread out newspaper to cover areas where students are working and give each student two paintbrushes, paintwash, and a paper manatee.
3. Using a paintbrush, have the students stir the paintwash and apply it to the manatee, covering it entirely.
4. After the manatee is completely painted, set aside and let dry for at least one hour. Collect the paint cups and used brushes from the students. Pass out a 12"x 18" sheet of white paper and cups of glue wash to each student.
5. After it has dried, have the students glue the manatee on the paper, paint side up. Give each student strips of blue and green tissue paper. One at a time, have the students dip the strips of paper in the glue wash and lay them vertically and diagonally on the white construction paper. Make sure students leave space in between the strips of tissue paper (some may overlap depending on the direction they're applied.) Students may also lay the dry strips on the paper and glue wash over them.
6. After all strips are applied, have the students use the paintbrush to dip into the glue wash and paint over the entire page. This will make the colors of the tissue paper blend in and give the appearance of water. Let the entire picture dry for at least one hour. When it's dry, they'll be able to see how well manatees are camouflaged to live in their homes.
7. Display the projects after they're completed. Use them as a counting exercise and count the "plants" (green strips) on different pages. Discuss differences. Have the students tell stories about the position of the manatees on the pages. Is the manatee swimming to the top of the water to breathe? Is it looking for its mother? Where would it go to get away from a boat? Encourage creativity!

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