Life Cycle of a Butterfly

By Carolyn Martin

Objective: Observe and identify the various stages of a butterfly: the egg, the larva, the chrysalis, the adult.Define metamorphosis.

Materials Needed:

•clear container for specimens (large jar works well; use a lid with air holes poked in or cover opening with plastic wrap held in place with rubberbands)  
•stick  
•paper towel  
•host plant leaves (fresh supply every couple of days)  
•Monarchs: milkweed leaves  
•Swallowtails: dill, carrot leaves, or parsley (use the same type of plant on which you find the caterpillar)  
•Monarch or Swallowtail caterpillars (or if you are lucky—a leaf with an egg)  
•Optional: a book about the life cycle of a butterfly such as Tiger by Robert McClung  
•Optional: worksheets or journal paper

1. Line the bottom of your bug jar with paper towel for easier clean up. These critters are messy.
2. Include a stick for the caterpillar to attach to for the chrysalis stage. Monarchs often use the lid of the jar because they hang down. A swallowtail uses a stick.
3. Place your caterpillar or egg in the jar. Include fresh leaves from the host plant if you have caterpillars.
4. Feed your caterpillars fresh leaves each day. (Store extra leaves in a Ziploc bag with a few drops of water in the refrigerator to maintain freshness.)
5. Observe what happens.
6. Use the observations to identify and define the terms: egg, larva, chrysalis, adult, metamorphosis.

Enrichment ideas.  
•Students can keep a record of the changes in a log. Young students can draw pictures, older students can journal about the changes.  
•Older students can research and write a report about the butterfly. The story of Monarch migration is fascinating.  
•Read Tiger by Robert McClung. It is the life story of a Tiger Swallowtail butterfly. Or read a similar type book.  
•Act out the stages of metamorphosis.  
•Booklets can be made with a page for each stage. Students can illustrate the stages and if capable write a sentence describing the stage.