

Investigating insects – part 1

Lesson description

In this lesson, learners will discover the names of insects that they find in their local outdoor surroundings and think about how they can be classified according to their characteristics.

Aims

All learners will:

1. discover the insects that live in their local surroundings
2. be able to name each insect and categorise it according to its key characteristics
3. practise using basic language structures to compare the insects.

Age group and level

5–8; A1+

Time

45 minutes

Materials

4. [Bugs flashcards](#) – one set per group or class
5. Student worksheet

Contributed by

Adapted by TeachingEnglish from a lesson by Griselda Beacon

Topic

Nature and wildlife

Lesson procedure

Introduction

This lesson is part 1 of two 45-minute cross-curricular lessons in which younger primary learners are encouraged to discover the natural world around them. In this lesson, combining English and natural science, they learn to name insects that they might typically find in the garden or park and think about how they could be categorised into groups by comparing their individual features.

Procedure

1. Pre-class lead-in (30 minutes)

- As a pre-lesson homework task, ask learners to make a list of insects that they can find in their local park or garden at home. Don't insist that the entire list has to be in English at this stage, but encourage them to use the English names that they already know. You could also ask them to draw a picture of the insect next to the name to help identify it later.

Note: If your school or teaching centre has a suitable outside space for this activity, it would be great to do it all together as a class.

2. Naming (15 minutes)

- Learners work in pairs or small groups. Ask learners to share their list of insects to see if they have the same or different ones. Then, starting with the ones they know in English, ask each pair/group to share an insect with the class.
- If you have a flashcard for that insect, place both the word and picture card on the board. If not, write the name of the insect on the board and draw a simple sketch so that everyone in the class knows what it represents.

Note: The flashcards included with this lesson plan have 12 different insects (bugs) that you can choose from, but you may wish to make your own flashcards to better reflect the ones that can be found in your local area.

- Each time, ask the other learners in the class if they have the same insect on their list, or ask them to stand up if they have it and then count together how many 'spiders' there are in the class. This will provide a fun way to drill the pronunciation of each insect and practise numbers and plural forms at the same time – one spider, two spiders, three spiders, etc.
- There may be insects on their lists that they didn't know the name of in English, so deal with these last and provide the translation if you know it or look it up together as a class if you don't. This is quite a nice way of creating a collaborative learning experience, and the learners will enjoy feeling as if they are teaching you something too!
- Make sure the insects on the flashcards that you're going to use in the next activity are already written on the board. If they weren't included in your learners' lists, you'll need to add them yourself. You can do this by saying *Look what I found in my garden!* and then showing them the flashcard to see if they know it and drilling the pronunciation before adding the word card next to the picture.
- Check that learners are familiar with the names of each insect by placing the picture flashcards around the room and calling out the different names in turn. Each time you call out an insect, learners point to its corresponding picture.
- Use the same idea to do a class drill of the insects' names, this time pointing to the picture cards yourself and asking the learners to call out the names all together.

3. Matching – find your partner (10 minutes)

- With the insect picture cards still placed around the room, tell learners you're going to call out the name of an insect and ask them to put up their hand if they can match the picture flashcard to the word flashcard on the board. As you call out each insect, emphasise the first sound by elongating the phoneme to help learners recognise the first letter of the word. Each time, select a different learner to place the picture correctly next to its corresponding word card and ask the whole class to repeat the name by asking *What's this?* while pointing to the picture and the word together. This will focus learners' attention on the written word and help them to read their word cards in the next activity.
- Remove all the flashcards from the board and tell the children to stand up and form a large circle. Explain that you're going to give some of them a picture card and some of them a word card. If you know that you have some stronger readers in the class, try to make sure that they are given a word card. Tell them not to show anyone the insect on their card.
- Tell them that when you call out *Fly!*, they have to 'fly' around the classroom like 'busy bees', and when you shout *Stop!*, they have to quickly try and find their partner – the person who has the matching word to their picture and vice versa. Demonstrate that they do this by saying *I'm a butterfly* or *I'm a mosquito*. Give them a few seconds to repeat this with two or three partners before calling out *Fly!* again and repeating the process. If they find their partner, they can sit down. Continue until all the children are sitting down with their insect partner!

Note: If you have an odd number of learners in your class, you could join in yourself or have two pictures of a particular insect trying to find one word for it.

4. Categorising (20 minutes)

- Ask all the 'spiders' in the class to hold up their cards. Ask the class some questions to elicit basic structures for describing the characteristics of a spider: *How many legs has a spider got / does a spider have? What colour is a spider? Can a spider fly? Can a spider climb?* Depending on the level of your learners, you may need to ask some follow-up support questions such as *Has it got four legs? Is it green?* or use some miming actions to help their understanding of the action verbs.
- Repeat for each insect and then write the following basic structures on the board so that the children will have some scaffolding for the next activity:
 - ⇒ *It has / It's got* + [number] + [*legs/wings/antennae*].
 - ⇒ *It's* [colour].
 - ⇒ *It can/can't* [action].

Note: *Has got* is more commonly used in British English, but you can decide whether to use *has got* or simply *has*.

- Divide the class into small groups and give each group a complete set of picture cards. Ask them to think about which insects could go together in the same group. Learners should be encouraged to use their own criteria to make the groupings (colour, size, number of legs, ability, etc.), but emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers – they can choose how to group them.

- As the learners organise their insect cards into groups, walk around the class to see how they are categorising them and encourage them to explain their decisions. As you monitor each group, model phrases like *They can all fly* or *They all have six legs*.
- When they have finished classifying the insects, tell them to compare their categories with another group to see if they are the same or different. Hopefully, this should result in some interesting comparisons!

Note: This could also be done as a whole-class activity with a single set of flashcards, using this alternative procedure:

- Put all the picture cards on the board and invite three or four children to come and group some of the insects. It's important that they choose their own criteria to classify the insects and that they decide together.
- When they have finished, write *They all ...* on the board and encourage a learner to explain the criterion, e.g. *They all have wings*. Ask the rest of the class if there are any more insects that could be added to the group.
- Then invite another small group of learners to come to the board and do the same with all the insects, using different criteria. Again, they explain it to the class, e.g. *They all have six legs*.
- Repeat the process until each learner has had a turn at coming to the board and categorising the insects, using different criteria each time. Obviously, it gets more difficult to think of new groupings each time, so they might need a bit of guidance, but encourage the rest of the class to suggest ideas rather than supply them yourself.
- Finally, to round off the activity, put different groups of insects on the board according to your own criteria and invite the learners to say how they are similar, using the same structure: *They all have ... / They can all ... / They are all ...*

5. Extension/Homework (15 minutes)

6. Pelmanism game using pre-prepared [Quizlet](#) flashcards – to match the words and pictures of the insects studied in this lesson.
7. Give each learner a copy of the **Investigating insects – part 1 worksheet** and ask them to colour the insects that they see before the next class (task 1) and then draw a line matching each drawing to its corresponding word, as per the example (task 2).