

Kids' Science: What if an Elephant Sat on it?

This kids' science activity generates discussion, bolsters confidence, and rings with laughter in the process of analyzing household items.

Here's a science activity that finds the kids' entrance to analytic thinking. Classifying and interpreting data go hand in hand with scientific procedure. This activity generates discussion, bolsters confidence, and rings with laughter in the process of analyzing household items.

Here's what you do:

The activity begins with a data collection adventure. Search around the house with your child for ten things that start with the letter b. After that, search for ten things that start with the letter c. Make a list of the items as you're going around the house (make sure the lists are labeled).

To make the data hunt more interesting, turn it into a challenge by using a timer. An oven timer will work just fine. Compare the times to determine which set of data was more difficult to collect.

Limitation: items must have weight. Things like blue, bouncy and beautiful are out. Things like boot, ball and bell are in.

Now take your lists to the kitchen table and begin the process of classifying and interpreting the data. Many of the classifications are zany, to say the least. The intention is to bring fun and laughter to the process.

1. Start by asking which item on each list is the smallest. For example, bean might be the smallest item on your first list, and clock might be the smallest item on your second list. Put a check mark next to those items.

2. Ask which of the items are the biggest. Bed might be the biggest item on the first list, and coat might be the biggest item on the second list. Put a square around those items.

3. Can you make a soup out of it? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following, for example:

-corn

-cards

-chair

-celery

Can you make a soup out of corn? How about cards? Record your answers.

4. If it were twice as big, could you still use it? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following items, for example:

-ball

-boot

-bowl

-brush

Could you still use a ball if it were twice as big? How about a boot? Record your answers.

5. Does Grandma have one in her house? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following, for example:

-computer

-cat

-couch

-crown

Does grandma have a computer in her house? How about a cat? Record your answers.

6. If it were green, would you still want it? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following, for example:

-banana

-bed

-book

-blouse

Would you want a green banana? How about a green bed? Record your answers.

7. If an elephant sat on it, would it still be any good? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following, for example:

-couch

-crayon

-clock

-costume

Would an elephant break your couch? How about a crayon? Record your answers.

8. Is it easy to rhyme? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following, for example:

-bell

-button

-broom

-butter

Is bell easy to rhyme? How about button? Record your answers.

9. Would you want ten more? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following, for example:

-cat

-clock

-cup

-curtain

Would you want ten more cats? How about ten more clocks? Record your answers.

10. Is it something you might take with you to the zoo? Go down the list and analyze each of the items. Consider the following, for example:

-boots

-brownies

-bottle

-books

Would you consider taking boots to the zoo? How about brownies? Record your answers.

At this point each of your lists should look like a chart. If you used symbols, then make a symbol guide on the bottom corner or back of the paper--the kind you see in the lower corner of a map. For example, if you used G for grandma and 2x for twice as big, then write:

G = grandma

2x = twice as big, etc

This way you can refer to the charts later without struggling to interpret the symbols.

Keep your charts in a folder so that as they accumulate (as you make lists of items that start with different letters) you can compare the data--for example, how long it took to gather each set of items. Or--which list has more of something. For example, 7/10 of the items in list b would break if an elephant sat on them, but only 5/10 items in list c would break. Lastly, don't overlook the opportunity to compare your answers with what mom, dad or a neighbor thinks. After all, it's not everybody who's willing to part with a green boot.

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