Activity 4.4
CAN YOU MAKE A FEATHER?

Materials Needed

- Feathers from Activities 4.2 and 4.3
- Light-colored construction paper
- Thin plastic drinking straw (not hinged)
- Strong glue
- Scissors
- Pencil

Procedure

1. Place your flight feather on a piece of construction paper. Outline it with your pencil.
2. Use your scissors to cut the outline of the feather from the construction paper.
3. Cut the straw so it is approximately the same length as the shaft of your flight feather.
4. Glue the straw on the paper feather in approximately the same position as the shaft of the real feather.
5. Compare the feather you have constructed with the real feather. Test the weight, strength, and resiliency (ability to bounce back when bent). What happens if you get it wet? Torn?
6. Would a bird like to have feathers like the one you made?

Teacher Information

True feathers are unique to birds. Although all birds have feathers, many do not fly. The oldest known fossil of a bird, archaeopteryx, had feathers, but probably could not fly because it appears to have had solid bones that would have made it too heavy. Small and apparently simple as it appears, the unique design of the feather has not been improved by modern technology.

Usually birds shed and replace their feathers annually through a process called molting. Animals with hair and fur (including humans) also shed and replace their covering on a regular basis.

Birds regularly use their beaks to groom and repair their feathers (zip them back together) and keep them in place so they function properly. The word preen is used to describe this instinctive, necessary behavior in birds, and is sometimes applied to vain humans. Many birds have an oil gland located near their tails that secretes a natural protective substance that is applied to their feathers with their beaks.

The feathers and down of many birds attract fleas and lice. Most birds are attracted to water. A large clear plastic bowl filled with water may attract as many birds as a feeder. Be sure the bowl is suspended or placed in an area that is cat-proof.

INTEGRATING: Art

SKILLS: Comparing and contrasting, identifying and controlling variables