

Millipede Marching

Objectives

- To help students appreciate the tremendous coordination an animal that has multiple legs.
- To help students develop coordination and cooperation (especially for younger children)
- To provide focus and incentive to make close observations of millipede locomotion

Supplies

- Kids in a variety of settings and spaces

Background

Sometimes it is difficult to get students to focus their observations on an animal with which they have little if anything in common. Millipedes are so completely different from people that a feeling of empathy is difficult to engender. But in order to have a respectful interaction with these animals that children are likely to encounter, it helps to have a frame of reference. This activity provides that reference and some active engagement and cooperation with classmates. Once children have tried to 'walk like a millipede,' they are likely to have a greater appreciation of the coordination and sophistication that these animals possess. *And it's fun!*

Procedure

When students are lined up to move from one place to another, have each student *gently* and *respectfully* place their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. The front person should make two antennas (if they want to) and even look mostly downward in the predictable scavenger fashion. Then have the class go wherever they are going. It will take them a few moments to get everything coordinated properly, but they will get really good at it soon and may end up preferring to walk this way all the time!

Once the group has its rhythm down, ask them to try to look at all the legs and the way they move. Then, when you have millipedes available for them to observe, ask them to compare their 'millipede' to the real ones. Be certain to have them focus on the similarities and differences. (For example, millipedes don't wear shoes – but if they did their shoes would probably all be the same kind! But, the point really is that all of its legs are really part of the same organism.) If the students are advanced enough to consider nerves and nervous systems they could try to relate the cooperation that was needed to solve the problem of walking smoothly in their group with the coordination within a millipede that allows these animals to do it so well.

This is an ambulatory activity. It is great for conducting your class to the lunchroom or in from the playground. You might even develop a "Millipede Brigade" or parade. Millipedes do not make any noise (important in school hallways) and they must always coordinate their many legs – tripping millipedes are not a pretty sight!