

Find Your Peanut

Synopsis

Each student is given a peanut and is asked to study it carefully. All the peanuts are then placed in a bag and mixed up. Students are then asked to find their own peanuts.

Objectives

After completing this exercise, students will be able to make careful observations in order to distinguish between several very similar objects.

Procedure

You will need a peanut for each student, and ideally, these should all be similar in appearance. They should all have the same number of nuts per pod, and they should not have obvious distinguishing blemishes or cracks. (Be mindful that some students may be highly allergic to peanuts. You could excuse those students, or you could do this exercise with some other biological objects that have the same kinds of variability and shelf life, for example, almonds, filberts, or other nuts in the shell.)

As you distribute the peanuts, advise students to handle them with the utmost care; they may not mark them in any way. Ask students to sketch their peanuts and describe them in writing in their science notebooks. Do not tell students that they will have to find their peanuts later. Simply instruct them to get to know their peanuts.

After a few minutes, put all the peanuts together in a bag, add a few extras, mix them up, pour them out with a flourish, and ask them to find their own peanut. Disputes may arise as two students try to claim the same peanut. The only 'hard evidence' they will have will be their notes and sketches. After the fact verbal claims may not be very convincing!

Collect the peanuts again. Have students pass their written work to another student. These students must now find the peanuts on the basis of this written work alone. No discussion allowed. Students may get rather upset when they discover that they don't have enough information. That's good. Ask the students to discuss what the problems were. What kinds of information would they need? Do the exercise one more time. It has been our experience that students are much more thorough in their observation and documentation. They now have a reason to communicate more carefully on paper, a neat trick to get them to write!

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