

KOALA ODOR ACTIVITY

Mammal:	Koala
Concepts Addressed:	Biomes; Classification; Ecology; Permeability; Adaptations
Materials:	Aluminum foil, Paper towels, Eucalyptus oil
Shopping List: [for class]	Aluminum foil Paper towels Eucalyptus oil (can be found at any health food store)

Background Information:

Koalas are slow and lazy during the day. In fact, they sleep in trees most of the day. However, at night, they eat eucalyptus leaves. These leaves are also used by humans to make cough drops because they contain menthol. Koalas eat so many eucalyptus leaves that they smell like eucalyptus or cough drops. How does this happen? Do you think it helps or hurts the koala to smell like menthol?

Instructions:

Have the participant smell the eucalyptus oil from the bottle; show them how to wave the odor towards their nose so they don't accidentally inhale a scent that could be dangerous.

Discuss that leaves have oil even though they are primarily water and fiber.

Have them put a few drops of the oil onto a paper towel. What happens?

Have them put a few drops of the oil onto a piece of foil. What happens?

Discussion:

Discuss permeability (having pores or openings that permit liquids or gasses to pass through).

Discuss mucous membranes (a membrane lining all body passages that communicate with the exterior, such as the respiratory, genitourinary, and alimentary tracts, and having cells and associated glands that secrete mucus). The oil passes through the koala's mucus membrane and is excreted through the skin, thus the smell (humans can experience this by consuming large amounts of garlic).

Students will guess that the smell is bad for the koalas because it will point them out to predators. This is logical, but koalas don't have any natural predators. In fact, the menthol smell helps the koala as it drives away fleas.



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