Name: _____

Monarch Butterflies: Beautiful But Poisonous

by Kelly Hashway

If you've ever seen a monarch butterfly, then you've probably noticed their bright orange and black colors. It makes them easy to see in the sky. You may think this would put the Monarch in harm from predators, but these bright colors are actually what protect the butterfly. Monarchs eat a plant called milkweed, which is why they are sometimes called "milkweed butterflies." Milkweed contains toxins that are not poisonous to Monarchs but are poisonous to other living things. These toxins that are a regular part of the Monarch butterfly's diet make them poisonous to predators. A bird flying through the sky will leave the flashy colored Monarch alone because it knows those bright colors mean the Monarch is poisonous.

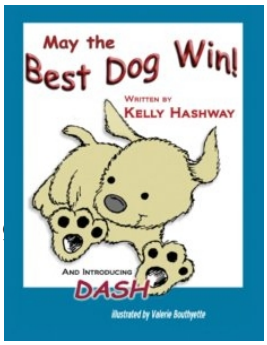
Monarch butterflies actually begin eating milkweed as larvae. As you probably know, butterflies begin as caterpillars. Monarch butterflies lay eggs on milkweed plants, and when an eggs hatches, the young caterpillar, or larva, begins to eat the milkweed. The caterpillar will eat the plant for about two weeks and grow to approximately two inches long. The caterpillar will then spin a silk pad and attach itself upside-down to a twig or leaf. Next it sheds its yellow, black, and white striped skin. This is the first step in the caterpillar's transformation to a butterfly.

Underneath the old skin of the caterpillar is a hard layer of skin called a chrysalis. The caterpillar will keep this chrysalis, or pupa, around its body and stay inside it for two weeks while it changes into a Monarch butterfly. The chrysalis will become transparent when the butterfly is ready to emerge. The Monarch uses the blood in its body to inflate its wings. Then it will hang in that same spot for hours until its wings dry and it can fly.

Monarch butterflies can live for very different lengths of time depending on what time of year they emerge from their chrysalis and become adult butterflies. If a Monarch reaches adulthood in early summer, it will most likely live for only two to five weeks. But if the Monarch becomes an adult at the end of the summer months, it will migrate south and live for about eight to nine months.

Monarchs can be found all over the world in tropic and sub-tropic areas. And if you'd like to observe them in your own yard, plant milkweed and wait for the Monarchs to come for a feast.

About the Author



Kelly Hashway's latest book, *May the Best Dog Win,* is now available!

Dash has the perfect life until the Super Sweeper 5000 shows up. Sweeper runs all over the house sucking up the leftover food scraps, and he even his own room! But Dash won't give up his place as the favorite dog without a fight.

Hashway, Kelly. *May the Best Dog Win*. ISBN: 9780984589081

Name: _____

Monarch Butterflies: Beautiful But Poisonous

by Kelly Hashway

1. What is a butterfly larva called?

a. caterpillar **b.** chrysalis
c. pupa **d.** a Monarch

2. About how long is a Monarch in the larvae stage? _____

3. Which would be the best way to attract Monarch butterflies to your yard?

a. place a dish of fruit on the lawn
b. plant milkweed in the yard
c. cut down large trees
d. place a small pool with water in the yard

4. Explain how a Monarch butterfly's bright colors help to protect it from predators.

_____

_____

_____

5. Re-read these sentences from the article.

Next it sheds its yellow, black, and white striped skin. This is the first step in the caterpillar's transformation to a butterfly.

Which is the best definition for the underlined word.

a. grow older **b.** sleep
c. remove **d.** change

Name: _____

Monarch Butterflies: Beautiful But Poisonous

Vocabulary Activity

Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the story. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. ____ ____ r y ____ ____ ____ i ____ _____

hint: pupa stage of a butterfly

2. ____ r a n ____ ____ ____ ____ e n ____ _____

hint: see-through; clear

3. ____ n f ____ ____ ____ ____ _____

hint: to fill up

4. ____ i g ____ ____ ____ ____ _____

hint: to move to another place

5. ____ w i ____ _____

hint: small branch

6. ____ e a ____ t _____

hint: a large meal

7. ____ o ____ i ____ s _____

hint: poisons

Name: _____

Monarch Butterflies: Beautiful But Poisonous

In the article, "Monarch Butterflies: Beautiful But Poisonous", you learned that a monarch butterfly's bright colors warn predators that is it poisonous to eat.

Think of another animal species that has a special way of protecting itself from predators. Write a paragraph to explain what the animal is and how it keeps from being hunted by predators.

ANSWER KEY

Monarch Butterflies: Beautiful But Poisonous

by Kelly Hashway

1. What is a butterfly larva called? **a**

- **a.** **caterpillar**
- **b.** chrysalis
- **c.** pupa
- **d.** a Monarch

2. About how long is a Monarch in the larvae stage? **2 weeks**

3. Which would be the best way to attract Monarch butterflies to your yard? **b**

- **a.** place a dish of fruit on the lawn
- **b.** **plant milkweed in the yard**
- **c.** cut down large trees
- **d.** place a small pool with water in the yard

4. Explain how a Monarch butterfly's bright colors help to protect it from predators.

A Monarch's bright colors warn predators that it is poisonous.

5. Re-read these sentences from the article.

Next it sheds its yellow, black, and white striped skin. This is the first step in the caterpillar's transformation to a butterfly.

Which is the best definition for the underlined word. **c**

- **a.** grow older
- **b.** sleep
- **c.** remove
- **d.** **change**

ANSWER KEY

Monarch Butterflies: Beautiful But Poisonous

Vocabulary Activity

Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the story. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. c h r y s a l i s — chrysalis
   hint: pupa stage of a butterfly

2. t r a n s p a r e n t — transparent
   hint: see-through; clear

3. i n f l a t e — inflate
   hint: to fill up

4. m i g r a t e — migrate
   hint: to move to another place

5. t w i g — twig
   hint: small branch

6. f e a s t — feast
   hint: a large meal

7. t o x i n s — toxins
   hint: poisons