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Monday Morning Science Blast

Skittle Sort

In teaching science, **the process is much more important than the product**. As a science teacher, my goal is to get my students to think as scientists and to do science rather than learn about science. In providing “doing science” experiences for students, lab activities that focus on science processes such as observation, classification, prediction and inference are excellent tools.

When I choose and develop the activities I use, I try to go with easily obtained, inexpensive materials, materials I can find at the supermarket, the hardware store, or the local Walmart, Target or Dollar Store. I also like to browse around in these stores looking for products that seem to lend themselves to doing science. I find that food related activities get my students quickly engaged and motivated to learn.

“Skittle Sort” is an activity that developed from a simple question, “What is the most common color of Skittle in a bag of Skittles?” This activity has been a great hit with groups of students from kindergarten through junior high and is a popular activity with teachers who attend my workshops. The activity is simple. I first divide students into groups of three or four and spend a few minutes discussing student experiences with Skittles, focusing on what they think is the most common color. After the brief discussion, I have the students predict what they think is the most common color, then the next most common and so on and so on. These predictions are recorded on their lab sheets.

Once all the predicting is done, I make a master data table on the classroom white board to show the predictions of each group. Then I pass out a bag of Skittles to each group with the direction to count the number of each color of Skittle and record their findings in the data table. When all the data is collected, I again record the findings of each group on the classroom white board data table so students can compare results.

The findings vary from group to group and provide an excellent opportunity to discuss sample outcomes, sample sizes and average outcomes. A question that often arises is, “Why is there more of some colors than others?” The spirited discussion we have often leads to a desire to extend the project by sampling more bags of Skittles in order to get a broader sample. Some groups have gone so far as to contact friends in other states to find if Skittle bags from different parts of the country produce different results. The extensions of this can go on at length, and when they do, I know I am accomplishing my goal of getting my students to do science.

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Skittle Sort

QUESTION: What is the most common color of Skittle?

MATERIALS:

- Aluminum pan
- Skittles - bag
- Graph paper

PROCEDURE:

1. Before opening your bag, make a prediction about which color is the most common to least common by putting a number above each color that ranks it. This is your hypothesis.

1 = Most common

5 = Least common

Green Orange Purple Red Yellow

2. Open the bag and dump the Skittles into the aluminum pan. Organize the Skittles into small piles based on color.
3. Count the number of Skittles of each color and record on the data sheet. Revise the hypothesis you made in Procedure #1 by renumbering each color of Skittle based on your findings.

Green Orange Purple Red Yellow

4. Make a bar graph that shows the number of each color of Skittle in your bag.

DATA:

Color	Green	Orange	Purple	Red	Yellow
Number					

QUESTIONS:

1. What was the most common color in your bag?
2. What was the least common color in your bag?
3. According to the whole class, what was the most common color of Skittle?
4. According to the whole class, what was the least common color of Skittle?
5. Why are there variations in the number of each color of Skittle in the bags?