Where Will the Wind Take Me?

Getting started

Read through the lesson and gather the necessary materials. If you need more information about the topic, refer to the “Background Information” below. Decide which version of the activity you will do. (See below.)

Do the Activity

1. Discuss the purpose of the activity with the children (to conduct a balloon release to determine how far winds will carry them and in what direction). Use “Background Information” as needed.

2. Fill large balloons with helium and tie them shut. Note: Mylar balloons are more durable and stay aloft longer than regular balloons but they are not biodegradable.

3. Attach a 3.5 in. x 5 in. postcard, made from 20 pound paper laminated on both sides, to each balloon.

4. Apply postage and have them self-addressed to be returned by whoever finds them.

5. On the other side of the post card, ask the finder to state when and where they found the balloon after it landed.

6. Keep one identically-prepared balloon as a control to see how many days it could lift the post card.

7. As the post cards are returned (this could take weeks), plot the sender’s return address on a map. These locations are the balloons’ landing points.

Alternative Version of Activity

As an alternative to actually launching the balloons into the atmosphere (environmental concerns or local laws may prohibit such a launch), a simulation can be done instead.

1. Fill numerous balloons with helium (different sizes and materials are acceptable).

2. Record how long each stays aloft inside the building.

3. Ask children to estimate how far each balloon would go if launched, and where the balloons would land.

4. Plot expected landing points on a map.

Materials Needed

- Helium-filled balloons
- State, regional, or national maps
- Laminated, self-addressed postcards with postage

4-H Project:
Science Discovery

Life Skill:
Acquiring and evaluating information

National Education Standard:
NS.K-4.4 Earth and Space Science

Success Indicator:
Estimate the direction a balloon will travel when launched.

Time Involved:
20–40 minutes. However, this may extend over several days or weeks.

Suggested Group Size:
1–20 children

This online “bonus” activity is part of the Exploring the Treasures of 4-H curriculum. © 2005, National 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System. See www.n4hccs.org/exploring4h for more information.
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