

An Antidote to Plagiarism

Grade Level: 5 - 10

Subject: Research (any discipline)

by Anthony Cody



My students do not know how to do research, and to write a report drawn from sources such as books and articles they find, as I discovered when I recently assigned them a research project. One of my sixth graders wrote “The land dips to a swale sprigged with wildflowers,” while another explained that “some dragonflies deposit their eggs exophytically, while others deposit them endophytically.” They wondered how I knew they had copied! Most of them really did not know how to take information from a source without copying, so I prepared this lesson.

Procedure

Explain to students that there is a difference between research, meaning drawing information from a variety of sources and putting it into your own words, and copying. Define the term “plagiarism” for them, and explain that this activity will teach them to actually write a research paper without copying. Have students read the passage on the next page, then record on the board any words that are new. Have the students define these words, then create an outline for students to organize their facts into. I created an outline that read:

1. **Life Cycle**
2. **Habitat**
3. **Role in the ecosystem (who eats whom)**
4. **Survival strategies**

Have the class brainstorm and list on the board all the facts related to lifecycle (tadpoles, etc.) Then have the students repeat this process on their own with the other categories. When they have completed their list of organized facts, they can write their report, using their own words. I expected a report a page in length, including all the important facts.

Give the students the following page.

Research, Don't Copy

Here's How:

There is nothing wrong with getting information from a book, or the web, but you cannot simply copy someone else's words and put your own name on it. So how can you take information and make up your own words without plagiarizing? Let's practice.

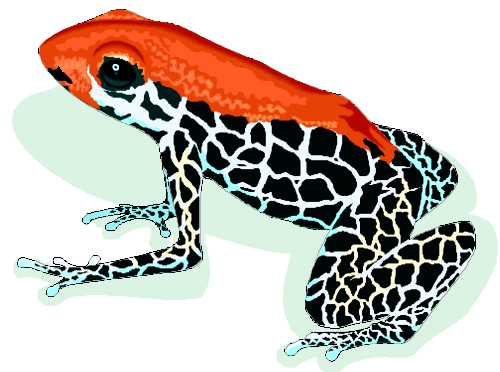
The Strawberry Poison Arrow Frog*

The strawberry poison arrow frog lives in the permanently wet leaf litter on the floor of Central American rainforests. Frogs are amphibians whose thin, porous skins lack armor and can't prevent moisture loss. This makes them vulnerable to drying out, so many frogs, like the poison arrow frog, spend much of their lives among moist vegetation or in aquatic habitats.

Shaded from the sun by the forest canopy, the frog can hop about in the clammy atmosphere. This warm, humid environment keeps the frog's muscles and organs working efficiently and provides a constant supply of insect prey.

Much of the rain that falls is trapped high in the leaf canopy, forming small pools in the cuplike leaf junctions of bromeliads (plants with spiky foliage that grow on tree branches). The frog uses these pools as secure nurseries for its tadpoles, which can't survive long out of water.

An adult poison-arrow frog stalks through decaying leaves on the forest floor looking for prey. The tiny hunter has a taste for ants, but will sample any small insects, spiders, or similar animals it may come across. Like other frogs, it tends to snap up anything that moves within range, and if the morsel tastes unpleasant, the frog quickly spits it out. For most animals, eating a poison-arrow frog means instant death. The fluid oozing from their skin includes the strongest of all natural toxins. But poisons aren't enough; a predator may not find out until he has taken a bite – resulting in both animals' deaths. So, the frog is brightly colored to warn that it is dangerous. Protected by its colors, the frog can parade safely in daylight, unlike other forest frogs which rely on camouflage to hide them from predators.



To Write A Report on Strawberry Poison-Arrow Frogs:

Step One: Make sure you understand what you have read. Find out the meaning of any new words.

Step Two: Make an outline of the basic ideas your report will cover.

Step Three: For each section of your outline, record the facts that belong in that section.

Step Four: Write a new report, using the facts, but putting these facts into words you understand and would use yourself.

*This reading is from Wildlife Explorer cards, copyright 1998, International Masters Publishers AB

Piggyback Polliwog*

Colorful little dart-poison frogs are safe from most enemies. That's because of poison in their skin. But enemies still go for the frogs' eggs and young. So the parents use lots of tricks to keep them safe.

For example, some kinds of dart-poison frogs lay their eggs under leaves on the forest floor. Then a parent stands guard over the eggs.

When the tadpoles hatch, they wriggle onto a parent's back – one or two at a time. The shape of the tadpoles helps them cling. And the skin on each parent's back oozes a gooey glue. This also helps the tadpoles stick tight.

Once the tadpoles are stuck on, the parent starts climbing. At the top, the parent looks for a bromeliad (bro-MEAL-ee-ad) plant. (That's a kind of plant with big leaves that catch pools of water. It grows on the branches of a tree.)

When the parent finds a bromeliad pool, it hops right in. Water in the pool helps to unstick the glue. Then the tadpoles can wriggle off their parent's back and swim free.

The parent makes a dozen or more of these long journeys, each time leaving tadpoles in a different pool. The tadpoles feed on tiny bits of dead plants and animals in the pools. The mother frog also brings each of the tads some extra food. The tadpoles slowly turn into brightly colored frogs. And then it's hip, hop, OUT!

*From Ranger Rick magazine, March 1991, Vol. 25, #3