Egg Carton Caterpillars

Age: Preschool-age (3-4 years)

This activity helps your child's development in this domain: Cognitive

What You Need:

- Egg carton
- Washable markers or water-based paint with paint brush
- Pipe cleaner or strip of paper
- Construction paper, thin cardboard, or index cards
- Scissors (for adult use only)
- Book: The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle (optional)

What To Do:

1. Cut the cup section of the egg carton in half lengthwise to form a strip of six cups.
2. Turn one of the strips upside-down and invite your child to paint or color the eggcups. This will be the caterpillar’s body.
3. Once the paint is dry, help her poke the pipe cleaner or strips of paper into the top of the first eggcup to make antennae on the caterpillar’s head. (Use a pencil to poke two small holes to insert the antennae.)
4. Have her draw the eyes and a mouth.
5. If available, read Eric Carle’s book The Very Hungry Caterpillar which shows the life cycle of a caterpillar (You can get it from the children’s section of your local public library). As you read the book, talk about the various foods the caterpillar eats and what happens to it as time passes.
6. Refer back to Carle’s book to talk about the life cycle of her new creation. Explain that caterpillars go through four distinct life stages:

A. The egg  
B. The larva (caterpillar)  
C. The pupa (chrysalis or cocoon)  
D. The adult (butterfly or moth)

7. Cut a sheet of construction paper or thin cardboard into four equal pieces (or use index cards). Draw one of the life stages on each piece of paper or card. Lay them out in order for your child to see and name. Shuffle them and ask your child to put them in order, describing what happens to the caterpillar in each stage.

VARIATIONS:

1. Explore outdoors to see if you can find caterpillars in their different stages. They can often be found around crown flower or citrus (orange, lemon) trees. Count and keep a tally of how many caterpillars you and your child saw.

2. If you find a caterpillar, make a viewing container so you and your child can watch what the caterpillar does and how it changes. Poke small breathing holes in the cover of a jar or clear plastic container. Add leaves from the plant you found the caterpillar on to the container. Place the caterpillar in the container and cover it. Add fresh leaves as needed so the caterpillar has enough food. Have your child check on the caterpillar daily and discuss what she sees. Prompt her with questions as needed. Release the butterfly or moth once it emerges from the chrysalis.

! Safety Alert: Adult-size scissors are not safe for young preschoolers. Keep them out of children’s reach.