

Looking and describing exercise - line, color and shape

Butterflies and moths often have magnificent wing patterns – they seem like works of art themselves. Since it is difficult to look really, really carefully at a live, flying insect, it is helpful to use photographs. There are many books with beautiful photos of unusual butterflies and moths. One of our favorites is named 100 Butterflies and Moths by Jeffrey C. Miller, Daniel H. Janzen and Winifred Hallwachs.

Let your child pick a page to talk about. Look at the photograph and have him use words to describe exactly what he is looking at. Using several of the “elements of art” - line, color and shape - you can break it down into a manageable way to describe the butterfly’s physical characteristics. As a follow up to this exercise, your child may then want to sketch or paint the butterfly or moth.



*left- photo of a moth page in the book 100 Butterflies and Moths that our student wanted to talk about
right- detail of the abstract painting our 2nd grader created after this looking exercise.*

Line What kind of lines do you see; thick, thin, short, wavy? Let them make up words that feel accurate to them. For example, they may not know the word scalloped, but call it bumpy.

Color Name the colors themselves. Dark orange, light orange, yellow, white, gray, black. What about the placement of color? There are bands of colors, first a thin band of black, next to the white, next to the orange. Then the bands become thicker and are made of tiny dots. The thicker bands are white, black light orange, dark orange then yellow.

Shape The moth’s head is an orange circle. (There is a white line under the circle.) Its abdomen is a long oval. (There is a white line at the bottom of the oval.) There is a gray shape on each of the four wings that has a rounded top and a pointy bottom. (The gray shape is outlined with a thick black line.)

This exercise builds observation skills and vocabulary. It helps us appreciate the intricate details that make each butterfly species unique.

Contributed by Lori Harris- Salt Creek Butterfly Farm