**ACTIVITY: Woolly sock walk**

**Activity idea**

In this activity, students learn about seed dispersal by walking through a paddock or area of long grass and plants while wearing woolly socks.

By the end of this activity, students should be able to:

* discuss the concept of seed dispersal
* begin to identify seeds
* learn about some of the conditions seeds need in order to grow.

[Introduction/background notes](#Introduction)

[What you need](#need)

[What to do](#Do)

[Discussion questions](#Discussion)

[Extension idea](#Extension)

**Introduction/background**

Plants disperse seeds in many ways. One of these is by catching on or sticking to the fur or feathers of an animal. Students replicate this method of dispersal by wearing woolly socks and taking a walk through an area of long grass, weeds or other plants. They then examine their socks to see if any seeds have ‘come along for the ride’. Finally, students plant their seeds to identify which plants the seeds have come from.

This activity works best on a dry day in late summer or early autumn. If there are no weedy or overgrown areas around the school, ask students to do this activity for homework. Have them bring in their socks and a description of the location (paddock, park, overgrown verge, bush, etc.)

**What you need**

* An old sock for each student – fluffy, woolly ones work the best
* An area of land with long grass, weeds or other plants
* Magnifying lenses, digital microscopes
* Plastic pots (optional)
* Potting mix (optional)

**What to do**

1. Read the article [Seed dispersal](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/103-seed-dispersal). Discuss why plants spread seeds away from where they are growing.
2. Discuss how animals help to disperse seeds. Explain that students will pretend to be animals with woolly feet and legs.
3. Move out to the area of long grass and/or weeds. This is one time it may pay to have Onehunga (prickle) weed! Students place a sock over one of their shoes and walk through the area.
4. While students are walking, look for any plants that you see in seed. Photograph or gather the plants for students to use later in the activity.
5. Once students have completed their walk, they remove the socks and return to the classroom.
6. Students examine their socks for seeds. Use hand lenses or similar to see how the seeds are attached to the socks.
7. Display the plants you’ve collected. Can the students match the seeds on their sock to the plants on display? Can they identify the name or type of the plant?
8. If desired, students can cut the fabric around the seeds and plant the fabric patches in potting soil to see what types of plants grow from the seeds.

**Discussion questions**

* Why is it best to do this activity in late summer or early autumn? (More likely to be seeds present.)
* How are the seeds attached to your sock?
* What other ways do animals disperse seeds? (Birds and other animals spread seeds through their droppings. Some animals carry seeds away for storage.)

**Extension idea**

Seed dispersal is an example of an evolutionary method to move seeds away from a parent plant. Doing so gives the seeds (new plants) a better chance for survival, as they do not have to compete with the parent plant for light, water or nutrients.

Use this activity in conjunction with the [Seed dispersal puppet play](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/108-seed-dispersal-puppet-play) to learn the different ways in which plants have evolved. Students can use the seeds they find on their socks along with other seeds they find outside to begin to group the plants and seeds according to their dispersal methods.