

## **Mason Wasps: Insect Builders**

### **Big World of Insects, Spiders & Bugs Series**

**Subject Areas:** Science, Life Science, Biology

**Synopsis:** The mason wasp is a fascinating solitary insect. Unlike many species of wasps and bees, this wasp does not live in a communal hive. This wasp builds small nests using mud, small stones and saliva and in each nest it lays a single egg. The wasp provides food for the egg by capturing caterpillars that it carefully places in the nest.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Objective 1)** Students will be able to describe and identify the characteristics of an insect, including the three body parts and six legs.
- Objective 2)** Students will be able to describe the life cycle of a mason wasp and how a mason wasp larva is provided for by its parent.
- Objective 3)** Students will be able to describe how a mason wasp differs from a social insect like a honeybee.

**Vocabulary:** Define and discuss the following key terms:

Solitary, ingenious, saliva, consistency, quarry, mortar, mason, inventive, larva, caterpillar, ravenous, succulent, paralyzed, maturation, emerges, instinctively, edible, predators

**Pre-Viewing Questions and Discussion:**

- 1) Can you think of any insects that build? What do these insects build? What are the 'buildings' used for?
- 2) What is the difference between a social insect and a solitary insect?

**Post-Viewing Questions and Discussion:**

- 1) Describe mason wasps. What do they look like? Where do they live? How are they different from social insects like honeybees?
- 2) What does the mason wasp nest look like? What materials is it built with? How does the mason wasp build the nest?
- 3) Why do the mason wasps' nests usually face the south or the east?
- 4) Where would you expect to find a mason wasp's nest?
- 5) What does the mason wasp provide as food for the developing larva? Describe how the mason wasp provides this food.
- 6) Why is the nest sealed?

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### **Additional Activities:**

- 1) Draw a detailed picture of a mason wasp. Label the head, thorax, abdomen, six legs, antenna, and wings.
- 2) Pretend you are a female mason wasp. Describe your typical day as you build a nest and find food.
- 3) Research the life cycle of these insects. Why are the caterpillars kept alive for the larva to eat? Why is it important that this food is kept fresh? Why does the number of caterpillars seem to determine whether the bee will be a male or a female? How did scientists determine this? Present your findings in a written report.
- 4) Find out if mason wasps are used as a pest control method for organic farmers. Do you think mason wasps would be appreciated by gardeners? Do these wasps eat only certain species of caterpillars?
- 5) Create a picture story of a mason wasp building a nest and capturing food for the larva.

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