mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Where do scarecrows come from?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey, it's Esther. I really enjoy growing a garden. I love planting new things and figuring out what they need. But being a gardener isn't always easy. For example, for a while, I had a hanging planter in my garden like this, but every time I tried to plant flowers in it, a bird would fly in and make her nest there, crushing the flowers. Now don't get me wrong. I love birds, and I usually like when they visit my garden. But it was frustrating to watch my flowers get crushed again and again. Eventually, I just stopped planting things in that planter. Someone named Layla has a question about how we deal with problems like this one. Let's give Layla a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Esther.
- Hey, Layla.
- I have a question for you. Where do scarecrows come from?
- That is a great question.

Have you ever seen a scarecrow before? The classic scarecrow looks like this, stuffed human clothing that kind of looks like a person. Maybe you've seen one in a cornfield before. Maybe you know the scarecrow character in The Wizard of Oz. In my neighborhood, I mostly see them as fall decorations. Images of scarecrows can pop up in all sorts of places. So you might wonder, what is the point of these things? There's a clue in the name, scare and crow. Picture this, you've planted a

beautiful vegetable garden. Look at that corn and those gorgeous tomatoes. Everything is growing big and healthy, and you are so excited for the garden to be ready for you to harvest and eat. But then here come the crows. The crows think your garden is big and beautiful as well. And they decide that, Hey, this would make an awesome snack. That's what I call a garden emergency. How do you keep crows from eating the growing vegetables? Do you have any ideas?

VIDEO 2

It turns out the problem of critters munching on growing plants has been a problem for gardeners and farmers for thousands of years. Over the years, people around the world have come up with different solutions. For example, let's go all the way back in time to ancient Egypt. In ancient Egypt, farmers grew crops in fields along the banks of the river Nile, but they had a problem. Local birds love to attack their growing plants and nibble on them. What was an ancient Egyptian farmer to do? They came up with a few different solutions. Some ancient Egyptian farmers covered their plants with nets that would catch the birds before they could reach the plants. Others sent local kids into their fields to make noise and chase away the birds. Other people in other places and times had similar ideas to solve this problem. In medieval Britain, farmers hired kids to run through their fields and chase away birds. In the sixteen hundreds, the people in the Native American nation Wampanoag built big structures by their fields so people could climb up on them to scare away birds. These plans work. As long as the nets stay up or the kids keep making noise in the field, the birds stay away. But what if the kids get tired? It's a lot of work to guard a field from birds all day and all night. In ancient Egypt, farmers came up with a different idea. Instead of having a human stand in the field all the time, they built big human dolls made of materials they had on hand like corn and straw and put those in the field instead. The hope was that if the bird saw the big doll, they'd think it was a person

and stay away from the crops. This is what we usually call a scarecrow. It's a big human sized doll people use to scare crows and other critters away from their gardens. The ancient Egyptians weren't the only people to have this idea either. Farmers in long ago Japan often built scarecrows with big hats and raincoats like this. And these ideas lasted all the way to the scarecrows we see today, like these. But okay, you might be wondering, does this actually work? Do scarecrows actually scare away crows and other animals? Well, kind of. Think of it this way. Imagine you just opened the door of your classroom one day and saw this right in front of you. You'd run away. But then imagine the scarecrow is there the next day and the next day and the next day, and it never moves or changes. It just stands there. After a while, you'd get used to it, right? You'd stop being scared of it and maybe even feel brave enough to come right up to it. It's the same with birds. At first, when they see a big, hulking, scary new thing, they might avoid the area. But over time, they get used to it and it doesn't keep them away anymore. Even though scarecrows like these have been popular for a long time, that doesn't mean that they always work. Today, we found new ways to make scarecrows that keep animals surprised and keep them away. Some modern scarecrows don't look much like people at all anymore, like this. This machine scares animals away by pointing a green light at them. Other modern scarecrows move or reflect light to distract and confuse critters, like this. And some modern scarecrows are even designed to look like other things that pests are afraid of, like this owl scarecrow. We also have other tools these days to keep animals away from our fields and gardens, like indoor farms or stronger fences. So in summary, scarecrows have been used in many different forms in different places over thousands of years to solve the same problem, animals getting into farms and gardens. Imagine you could invent an even better scarecrow to keep pests out of gardens and farms today. What would you add or change? What would your new improved scarecrow look like? That's all for this week's question. Thanks for asking, Layla.