

Waiting for our Monarch butterflies to emerge

A couple weeks ago we sent away for five caterpillars. When they arrived, they were tiny, moving around inside their plastic cup and not doing much else.



They grew...



and grew.



Then on Friday the first two climbed to the lid of the cup and became chrysalides.



As I understand it, and biology is not my thing, they aren't technically inside cocoons. It's almost as if they are worms who have shed the exoskeleton that made them look like caterpillars.

We waited and waited, but the other three caterpillars did nothing until Saturday night when they climbed to the lid of the cup and hung like Js. But they didn't show any sign of becoming chrysalides.



You might be a really patient person. But patience is not my strength. And when we got up on Sunday morning and they were still looking like caterpillars with little feet and fuzzy bodies, I started to worry we had done something wrong.

Now, you could point out that we hadn't really had to do anything except keep the cup in a safe place and not bang on it. But I still had my doubts.

So I did what any rational mother offering science lessons in her kitchen in 2015 would do. I tweeted @InsertLore, the company that sold them to us. I sent them a photo and a question about how long it should take.

Astonishingly, they replied. But by the time I heard back, the last three caterpillars had shed their exoskeletons and were hanging as lovely chrysalides from the roof of their jar.

In fact, I captured a very amateur video of the last moments of one of them shedding its exoskeleton.

I like that it's hanging between a chrysalis—the singular of chrysalides—and a caterpillar that hasn't yet shed its exoskeleton.

And so now we wait a couple days and transfer the chrysalides carefully and gently into a butterfly habitat. Then we will begin the real wait, as we count the days to when the butterflies will emerge.

I'm excited and nervous and hopeful. Our sons are fascinated, but not nearly as curious about this whole endeavor as I am.

We're learning a little about science, but we're learning even more about patience. Then when the butterflies emerge, we'll enjoy them for a few days and learn about setting them free—and saying goodbye.

For that...well...we're not in any hurry.



Correction: Since posting this blog, I have learned that our caterpillars are not Monarchs but Painted Lady butterflies. And so my biology education continues....

Just FYI, we ordered our butterfly habitat here. Thank you to Rosie at A Blog for My Mom, who told me about the kit!