

A CATERPILLAR'S JOURNEY

Junnifa recently found a caterpillar under a lemon tree in her garden. Eager for the chance to watch a metamorphosis up close, she did a little research on how to make a caterpillar comfortable and got to work. She created a small shelter for it and provided leaves from the lemon tree. The caterpillar ate and seemed okay until one day it stopped eating and didn't move much. Junnifa's sister described it as "such a grumpy caterpillar." They observed that it pooped a lot and did not want to be disturbed, which Junnifa recognized as signs that the caterpillar was getting ready for the next stage. She made some modifications to the shelter and left out a branch so the caterpillar would have some hanging options for when it was ready.

The next morning, the caterpillar had attached itself to a spot on the lid of the shelter and had begun its transformation. It was subtle at first. In fact, some commented that the caterpillar looked dead. But Junnifa knew it wasn't—she observed and could see small, barely perceptible movements. The caterpillar was slowly but surely shrinking, and the color was also gradually changing.

After a while, Junnifa noticed the caterpillar was now pale. She knew it was almost time for it to pupate, so she watched and waited. It was an amazing process to watch the caterpillar transform, shed its old skin, and form its chrysalis. Gradually again, the color started to change from green to brown and started to resemble a little twig. Nothing seemed to happen for 10 days, and then there was another slight color change, which could have again been missed. Junnifa knew the time was close for the final transformation: She watched and waited and ensured there was a spot for the caterpillar to hang and space for it to fly once it transformed into a butterfly.

And just like that, at the right moment, Junnifa looked up and saw a beautiful butterfly had emerged. It hung for a while and then stretched out its wings and flew. It was such a joyful moment for their whole family.

Dr Montessori uses the analogy of the caterpillar's metamorphosis to describe the child's development, and Junnifa had quoted it many times over the years. But experiencing it firsthand showed her how true it really was.

Children grow and change, physically and psychologically. Sometimes the changes are obvious, and other times, they are barely perceptible. Sometimes it involves behaviors that we may not understand or cause us frustration, but it is all a natural part of development that children need to experience to become adults.

Of the many gifts that the Montessori method has given us, the most critical one is the understanding of how children develop and how to support our children through their journey of metamorphosis.