

# Art + Observation

## Activities inspired by Maria Sibylla Merian



# Who was Maria Sibylla Merian?

She was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1647, the ninth child of famous German artist Matthäus Merian. Maria's father died when she was three, and her mother remarried. Maria's stepfather, Jacob Marrel, was a still-life artist who encouraged the young Maria to sketch and paint. Maria would gather plants, flowers and insects as her subjects and was particularly fascinated by caterpillars. She would collect the creatures and watch them for days, weeks and months as they transformed into moths and butterflies, a process known as metamorphosis.

As a teenager, Maria began to study other insects in great detail. She would capture and keep silkworms at home to study their life stages. She made amazingly accurate observations and illustrations of her findings.

At 16, Maria married Johann Andreas Graff and had two daughters together, Johanna and Dorothea. They moved to Nuremberg where they stayed for 14 years. It was during this time that Maria published her first major work, a 'Book of Flowers' (1675).

Maria published 'The Wondrous Transformation of Caterpillars' (1679) – a book containing nearly 20 years of her observations. At the time, people thought insects 'generated' from decaying matter – that maggots came from rotten meat, for example, or caterpillars from cabbages. Maria was the first to show that insects are in fact born from eggs. She also showed the life cycle of moths and butterflies and the way insects feed and live on plants.

Maria and her daughters set up an art studio in Amsterdam and continued to study nature and create art. They traveled to Surinam to study the rainforests and published a book of their findings. Their findings were so amazing that some people refused to believe that things such as

A bird eating spider ever existed! Her unique observations are now found in museums and bookshops around the world – celebrating her outstanding contribution to the scientific study of insects.

# Fun Facts!

- Maria kept a journal of her observations from the age of 13, for 53 years. It was rediscovered in Russia in the 1970s and published in Germany in 1976.
- Maria's portrait used to appear on the German 500 Deutsche Mark bank-note, before the country converted to the Euro.
- On April 2 2013, Google celebrated Maria's 366th birthday with an illustration of a plant inhabited by insects and a cheerful-looking lizard.



# Materials Needed



1. Paper
2. Pencil, Pen, Colored pencils
3. Leaves, flowers, plants or other items from nature to observe

# Directions

1. Look closely at the drawings below. What do you see in the drawing? What types of shapes do you see? Do you notice any similar shapes or lines? Are any plants or insects similar to each other?
2. Now look at your nature items. Notice the shapes, lines and similarities.
3. Draw your nature items. Share them with your family and friends! Can they guess what the items are? What did you learn?
4. If you captured any insects or living creatures, please release immediately! They are not pets and should be treated with respect.



# Be A Nature Observer!

For more activities and fun videos, check out our free Learning Kits which you can download and use at home! You can find them at <https://plantingfields.org/learningkits/>.

Learn to make your own nature journal with a short video!

Check out our Vimeo Channel at

<https://vimeo.com/430140929>

Share your drawings with us!

Email [info@plantingfields.org](mailto:info@plantingfields.org) or

tag us on social media with

#loveplantingfields.

You can find more information about Maria's extraordinary life at [activityvillage.co.uk](http://activityvillage.co.uk).

