Marjorie Weber

Researcher Background:
Marjorie Weber is an evolutionary ecologist at the University of Michigan. The Weber Lab studies how ecological interactions impact evolution and diversification across evolutionary scales. Their research focuses on interactions between species (typically plants, arthropods, and fungi), with an emphasis on plant traits that mediate mutualistic and defensive interactions.

Q: How would you describe your science to a 5th grader?
A: I study plants and insects. If you look at earth's biodiversity, there are so many different species of plants and insects! My research asks about how the different interactions between plants and insects impacts their success. This includes interactions where insects help the plants (like pollination) and interactions where insects harm the plants (like herbivory). This research is important because it helps us understand how to protect earth's biodiversity and food plants!

Q: Why did you become a biologist?
A: I was fascinated by the life-view that all beings on earth are connected via a common evolutionary thread. How incredible!

Q: What is your favorite part about your job?
A: Studying the mysteries of the natural world.

Q: What obstacles have you overcome to get where you are?
A: As someone with dyslexia, I struggled with challenges related to typical learning structures. In school, I never thought I was the “smart kid” – it was difficult to believe that I could become a scientist. With the help of inspiring teachers and role models, I slowly began to believe in myself. With perseverance, I was able to get a PhD and become a professional scientist. It is a wonderful job!

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Q: What are hobbies and/or interests that you have outside of your research?
A: I love doing art and crafting! Painting, drawing, and felting are my favorites. I also have little kids, so I love to play with them. We also love to cook and garden as a family!

Q: What is your favorite thing about your hobby/how did you get into it?
A: I find art and crafting relaxing, and it makes me feel good to create something beautiful. Science is a lot like art - they are both creative and enriching, but they also complement each other in many ways as well! I started doing art as a kid, long before I started doing science. I have always loved it, and I have always thought of myself as a creative, artistic person.

Q: What do you believe are key elements that contribute to being successful in biology?
A: Creativity and persistence are both key elements: thinking of creative new ways to ask questions, and then responding with resilience when you encounter puzzles or hiccups.

Q: What advice do you have for aspiring biologists?
A: Don't let limiting beliefs about yourself hold you back!

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