Kids Build Pumpkin-Tossing Catapult

After some students learned in school about an ancient weapon called a catapult, they decided they wanted to build one of their own. They didn't want to build a desk-size catapult in their classroom. Instead, they wanted to build a working catapult that could throw pumpkins several hundred feet!

The students who built the catapult are middle-school students in New Jersey. When they told their teacher they wanted to build a catapult, the teacher thought they might build it on a nearby farm. The farmer and his wife said a catapult that could throw pumpkins might attract customers. So the boys spent time learning about the science of catapults so they could build a catapult that would really work.

NEWS WORD BOX

catapult   ancient
lever   customer
release   enemies

After six weeks of learning about catapults and building one -- with help from the farmer and their teacher -- the students were ready to try it out. They pulled down the catapult's long lever, which lifted a 300-pound weight into the air. Then they placed a big pumpkin in a sling at the other end of the lever and locked down the lever. When they were set to fire, several students yanked on ropes to release the lever. That made the 300-pound weight drop quickly to the ground, which sent the pumpkin flying into the air like a rocket.
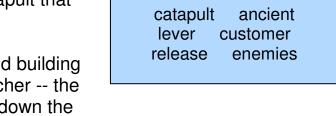
Catapults have been around for thousands of years. Long ago, soldiers used catapults to launch large rocks at their enemies from a distance. Some catapults even had wheels so they could be easily moved from place to place.

MORE FACTS ABOUT CATAPULTS
- The catapult the students built is called a trebuchet (pronounced tray-BOO-shay).
- The students only launch pumpkins that are broken and can't be sold.
- Next year, the kids want to build a smaller catapult with wheels.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

Catapults use levers to operate.
What other tools or devices can you think of that use levers?