

Year 6

Life cycles: activity ideas

1 Make an interactive display by asking the children to draw or paint a number of different plants and animals onto stiff card, before cutting them out. They should produce large arrows in the same way. Attach Velcro pads or Blu-tack to the back of the cut outs, and provide the children with an area onto which they can stick the plants, animals and arrows to show different food chains. This could be a constantly changing display. Children or teachers could also put up incomplete food chains and invite others to finish them off.

Safety note: be aware of the potential effects of pollen on hay fever or asthma sufferers. Take the children around the school grounds or a local park, and ask them to look for and observe insects feeding and consequently pollinating plants.

2 Ask the children what factors affect the germination of seeds and how this could be tested. Encourage them to consider what could be altered, such as light, temperature, amount of water, or the growing medium. Using several seeds to produce more reliable results, set up investigations with small groups by placing seeds in different conditions and investigating one of the agreed factors. Each group should carefully observe, record and present their findings. Be aware that some seeds take longer to germinate than others. Broad beans, cress or radishes could be used, but many others are suitable. Also, be aware that some children may consider that light is needed for germination because they know that it is needed for growth.

Safety note: off-site visits must be carried out in accordance with LEA/school guidelines and policies. Also, ensure that children are aware that they could get a bee or wasp sting if they do not take care.

4 Collect samples of soil from different areas, and ask the children to examine and compare them. They could do this by simply studying the soil and feeling its texture and moisture content. Following this, they could look more closely using hand lenses, traditional microscopes, or electronic ones that can be used with a computer and would allow images to be captured and saved.

Safety note: when working with soil ensure there is no broken glass, dog faeces, and so on. Tell the children that soil contains bacteria that may be harmful, and ensure that hands are thoroughly washed afterwards.

3 Examine the structure and parts of a flower by dissecting them. Depending upon the time of year when this study is undertaken, different flowers may be available. Daffodils are ideal because the different parts are easily separated and identified. After taking the flower apart, identify the female parts (the carpel, including the ovary and stigma, which receives the pollen) and the male parts (the stamen, including the anther, which produces the pollen). Look at a whole flower and ask the children to suggest ways in which pollen may be transferred from the anther of one flower to the stigma of another (insects or wind).

5 Make a link to literacy by asking the children to carry out factual research, using skills of skimming, scanning and efficient reading, so that research is fast and effective. They could write a leaflet or page for a non-fiction text, explaining the life cycle of a plant using appropriate style and form to suit the purpose.

6 Use secondary sources to identify features of new-born babies in different species. How do they differ from each other in the amount of care they need from adults? How do new-born animals differ in the amount of care they need compared to a human baby?

