Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 35 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a "window" to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here's one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of **systems.**

Activity 45: Web of Life

In this activity, children will learn about food webs, discovering the many ways that plants and animals of a forest ecosystem are connected.

Doing the Activity

A forest is a complex living system. While its appearance is often dominated by trees, a healthy forest is composed of many different animals and plants that interact with and depend on each other.

A ***food chain*** is a simplified way of showing energy relationships between plants and animals in an ecosystem. For example, a food chain of sun > plant seed > mouse > owl shows that a plant seed that grows from the sun's energy is eaten by a mouse, which in turn is eaten by an owl. However, in reality it is rare for an animal to eat only one type of food. A ***food web*** represents the interaction of many food chains in an ecosystem.

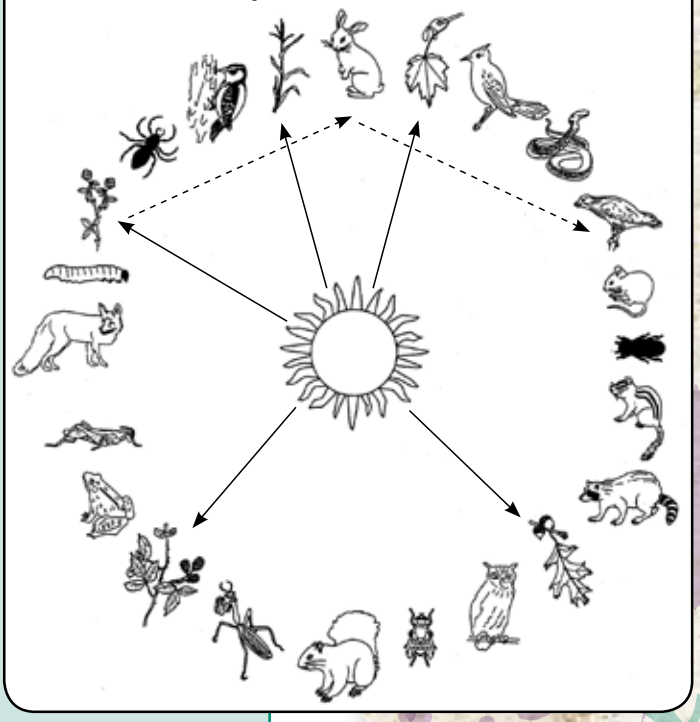
Invite children to think about the food web of a nearby wooded area. Ask:

1. What plants and animals might you find in a healthy forest ecosystem?
   (Be sure to include mammals, insects, birds, reptiles, trees, and other plants).
2. What might happen to the forest ecosystem if we remove an item from this list?
3. What might happen if humans are introduced to this ecosystem?

Have children visually depict a food web by drawing a woodland scene (hills, valleys, streams, trees, etc.) on sheets of cardboard or poster paper. Add photos or drawings of the organisms they came up with in Question 1. Place a push pin next to each plant or animal, and use yarn to connect the organisms to others with which they interact.

The diagram shows examples of organisms that depend on each other for food. Starting with the sun, can you connect the organisms into five different food chains to form a food web? One food chain has been completed for you. Hint: there are multiple combinations! When you have connected all the organisms you have created the food web!

Example Forest Food Web



Adapted from Activity 45: Web of Life from Project Learning Tree's *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide.*

www.plt.org

Discover how PLT can help you teach... from nature!

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- To contact your local PLT State Coordinator, visit www.plt.org or call 202-765-3641.

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Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation.