



I am What I Eat 5rd Grade 10- 20 minute Activity

This simple activity challenges students to think of organisms in terms of the role they play in the carbon cycle of their ecosystem.

Great for: Reinforcing familiarity with species and their ecological roles.



Time: 10-20 minutes

Materials:

- At least one deck of organism cards
- Optional: tape or something to affix cards to the board

Prep:

1. **Print the cards.** Selecting different paper colors for each type of organism will reinforce concepts of trophic levels and make this task a little easier as students recognize the pattern of colors. You also may decide that the students are ready for more of a challenge and keep all the cards white.
2. **Create categorized spaces for students to place the cards.** Label sections of the board, or other areas everyone can see, like space on the floor or desks with the trophic roles: **producer; consumer: herbivore, omnivore, carnivore; decomposer.** (An advantage of horizontal surfaces is the ability to slide cards around without picking them up and inviting the temptation to look at the back.)

The Trophic Roles

Producers produce their own food like Plants photosynthesizing sugar from sunlight, air & water.

Herbivores eat plants.

Omnivores eat both animals and plants.

Carnivores eat meat.

Detrivores eat non-living things like leaves that have fallen from trees, scat and dead things.

Play:

- 3. Introduce vocabulary.** Explain that we will be thinking about living things in terms of what kinds of things they eat or where they get their energy. Students are usually at least familiar with the term “carnivore” so you may wish to start by asking what it means and then move on, asking students to guess what each category eats.
- 4. To play as a class,** pass out cards, one to a student and invite students to hypothesize about their species by placing their card in the appropriately designated area. Remind them to try to do this without peeking at the information on the back of the card!
- 5. Encourage peer review** of the students’ conclusions on where their organism fits into the food web and request evidence of at least one reason why they placed their card where they did.
- 6. Verify your work!** When students have reviewed their choices sufficiently, flip over the cards to reveal their species’ trophic role and a list of some of the things it eats.

Discussion:

Was anything surprising? Do any cards need to move categories? Did any of the species eat something unexpected? How does this change the way we think about them and how they might be important in their ecosystem? Students may notice that some species change what they eat – or what they are eaten by- in a drastic way when they grow from eggs or babies into adults.

Remind students that even the biologists who study plants and animals for a living often get surprised, confused, debate with each other, and change their minds about questions of how to label living things. Life on Earth is wonderfully complicated and continually full of surprises!

Variations:

Team Challenge: If you make more than one set of cards, this could be done in smaller teams like table groups. Race teams or add a time limit challenge to spice it up.

Solitary Play: Students could also play this as a quiet, individual activity like solitaire, either sorting cards by trophic level or stacking cards to build food chains.