

WEB OF LIFE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Web of Life activity is designed to introduce and explain the “balance of nature.” Students will learn how plants and animals are constantly interacting with each other. If these interactions and/or relationships are in balance, the natural world remains healthy. It is stressed that we are also part of the web and have a responsibility to take care of it so we and all other living creatures can continue to enjoy a healthy environment. This activity can be modified to accommodate grades 1–6. The students will experience many hands-on activities to facilitate this understanding.

The Web of Life is introduced to the students with an explanation on the transfer of energy. All living things need energy from the sun to survive. Plants and some other organisms are able to produce their own energy using photosynthesis to change the sun's energy into chemical energy (food) they can use. These plants and organisms are called producers — for example, grass, plants, trees, and cacti. Animals are not able to make their own energy through photosynthesis but instead rely on plants or other animals to obtain energy. They are called consumers. Animals that eat producers (plants) directly are called herbivores. Carnivores and omnivores are discussed, including how each contributes to the balance of nature. The cycle is completed with a brief discussion of decomposers.

The activity contains many animal skulls, skins, foot impressions, and scat. All the animals represented are found in Sabino Canyon. Skulls, foot and leg samples, scat, and skins help explain how the structure of each animal enables it to survive. How do they use their various body parts for defense, foraging, predation, digging, protection, and hunting?

The physical representation of a web enables the students to understand how each strand supports the entire ecological community. They learn that a problem with one part of the web affects the entire community.