



## Lesson Overview: Energy Flow through Ecosystems

Grades 2-5

### Big Idea/Learning Goal

Energy flows through ecosystems in food chains from the sun, producers, consumers, and decomposers. Organisms depend on each other to gain enough energy to survive in their habitats.

### Essential Questions

- How do different organisms obtain energy to survive, grow, and reproduce?
- How is energy transferred in ecosystems through food chains?
- How do different organisms, including humans, affect food chains?

### Objectives

- Students will **investigate** how different organisms obtain energy.
- Students will **identify** producers, consumers, and decomposers in their schoolyard.
- Students will **demonstrate** how energy flows through an ecosystem in food chains.

### Assessments

- Ecological role presentations
- Ecological role identification in schoolyard scavenger hunt
- Ongoing discussions and questioning
- Backyard Food Chain assignment

### Background

All organisms need **energy** in order to survive, grow, and reproduce. They obtain this energy in a variety of ways. Ultimately, the energy in an ecosystem comes from the sun, and flows through an ecosystem from one organism to another through complex ecological relationships. Some organisms can use the sun's energy to produce their own food; while others like humans need to eat food (consume) in order to gain energy; still others break down (decompose) dead material for energy. We call these organisms producers, consumers, and decomposers, respectively.

In order for organisms to survive, they must obtain energy either from the sun or by consuming or decomposing other organisms through a **food chain**. Each step of the food chain provides energy for the next step. The arrows show the direction of energy flow from one to another.

Sun → Grass → Grasshopper → Toad → Hawk → Fungi

The grass uses the sun's energy to produce its own food. The grasshopper eats the grass, the toad eats the grasshopper, and the hawk eats the frog. After the hawk dies, it provides energy to decomposers, such as fungi, which break down the organism and return its nutrients to the system.

## Vocabulary

**Carnivore:** An animal that eats meat

**Consumer:** An organism that obtains energy by consuming another organism; includes carnivores, herbivores, and omnivores

**Decomposer:** An organism that obtains energy by breaking down dead organic material

**Energy flow:** The transfer of energy through a food chain from one organism to another

**Food Chain:** The flow of energy in an ecosystem beginning from the sun to a primary producers (plant) to a consumer to decomposers.

**Herbivore:** An animal that eats plant materials

**Inference:** A conclusion reached based on evidence and reasoning from observations

**Observation:** The process of carefully examining or looking at something in order to gather information

**Omnivore:** An animal that eats both plant materials and meat

**Predator:** An organism that hunts another organism

**Prey:** An organism that is hunted by a predator

**Producer:** An organism that obtains energy through photosynthesis: sunlight, carbon dioxide, and water

## Activities

1. [Predators and Prey](#)
2. [Producers, Consumers, Decomposers](#)
3. [Building Food Chains](#)
4. [Food Chains Rummy](#)

## Next Generation Science Standards

5-LS1-1. Support an argument that plants get the materials they need for growth chiefly from air and water.

5-LS2-1. Develop a model to describe the movement of matter among plants, animals, decomposers, and the environment.

5-PS3-1. Use models to describe that energy in animals' food (used for body repair, growth, motion, and to maintain body warmth) was once energy from the sun.

\*\*3-LS1-1. Develop models to describe that organisms have unique and diverse life cycles but all have in common birth, growth, reproduction, and death.

\*\*In Activity 2, relevant when discussing that animals may herbivores, omnivores, carnivores, scavengers at different life stages.



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This activity was developed by the Encyclopedia of Life Learning + Education Group as part of the Okaloosa SCIENCE grant, supported by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) under Award No. H#1254-14-1-0004. Opinions, interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by the Department of Defense. Learn more about this grant at: [www.okaloosaschools.com/okaloosascience/](http://www.okaloosaschools.com/okaloosascience/)