Deceased Deer

Life Science | Lesson Guide

1st Grade

Photo Description

A deer is lying on the ground and is not moving. The deer's body is on dirt and dried grass. We can see the deer's legs, body, and antlers.

Scientific Phenomena

This image represents the Anchoring Phenomenon of death in nature and decomposition. The deer has died, which is a natural part of all living things' life cycles. When animals die, their bodies begin to break down through a process called decomposition, where bacteria and other organisms help return the nutrients from the body back to the soil to help plants grow.

Core Science Concepts

1. Life Cycles: All living things are born, grow, and eventually die - this is the natural cycle of life
2. Decomposition: When living things die, their bodies break down and become part of the soil
3. Ecosystem Connections: Dead animals provide food and nutrients for other living things like bacteria, insects, and plants
4. Basic Needs: When animals cannot get their basic needs met (food, water, shelter, air), they may die

> **Pedagogical Tip:**
>
> When discussing death with first graders, focus on the natural, scientific aspects and emphasize how death helps new life grow. Use gentle, matter-of-fact language and be prepared to address students' emotional responses with sensitivity.

> **UDL Suggestions:**
>
> Provide multiple ways for students to express their understanding - through drawing, acting out life cycles with movements, or using manipulatives to show the cycle. Some students may need visual supports or simplified vocabulary to access these concepts.

Zoom In / Zoom Out

1. Zoom In: Inside the deer's body, tiny organisms called bacteria are starting to break down the cells and tissues, turning them into nutrients that will go into the soil.

2. Zoom Out: This deer is part of a larger forest ecosystem where its body will feed many other living things and help plants grow, which will then provide food and shelter for other animals.

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Discussion Questions

1. What do you notice about this deer's body? (Bloom's: Observe | DOK: 1)
2. How might this deer help other living things in the forest? (Bloom's: Analyze | DOK: 2)
3. What do all living things need to stay alive? (Bloom's: Remember | DOK: 1)
4. How is this part of the cycle of life in nature? (Bloom's: Synthesize | DOK: 3)

Potential Student Misconceptions

1. Misconception: "The deer is just sleeping and will wake up."
   Clarification: When animals die, their bodies stop working completely - they cannot breathe, eat, or move anymore.

2. Misconception: "Dead things are scary or bad."
   Clarification: Death is a natural part of life that helps new plants and animals grow and stay healthy.

3. Misconception: "All animals die because they get hurt."
   Clarification: Animals can die for many reasons - old age, sickness, not finding enough food, or changes in weather.

Cross-Curricular Ideas

1. ELA - Storytelling & Writing: Students can create a simple story about the deer's life before it died. They can draw pictures and dictate or write sentences about what the deer might have eaten, where it lived, or what friends it had. This connects to narrative writing standards while reinforcing the life cycle concept.

2. Math - Counting & Measurement: Students can measure the deer's body length using non-standard units (hand spans, blocks) or count how many legs, ears, and antlers the deer has. This integrates measurement and counting skills with observation of the animal's body parts.

3. Art - Nature Collage & Life Cycles: Students can create a circular life cycle art project using natural materials (leaves, twigs, soil) to show the stages of a deer's life: birth, growth, adulthood, death, and decomposition. This helps them visualize the continuous cycle while practicing fine motor skills.

4. Social Studies - Respectful Remembrance: Students can discuss how different cultures honor and respect animals, then create a "memorial" for the deer using drawings or a class poem. This introduces empathy, respect for nature, and cultural awareness while processing their emotional responses to the image.

STEM Career Connection

1. Wildlife Biologist: A wildlife biologist is a scientist who studies animals in nature. They learn about how animals live, what they eat, and what happens when they die. Wildlife biologists help keep forests and animals healthy and safe. They might study deer in the forest to understand how many live there and if they have enough food to eat.
   - Average Annual Salary: $63,000 USD

2. Veterinarian: A veterinarian is a doctor for animals! They help sick and injured animals feel better. Sometimes veterinarians study why animals get sick or die, which helps them learn how to keep other animals healthy.
   - Average Annual Salary: $99,000 USD

3. Environmental Scientist: An environmental scientist studies nature and how living things connect to each other and their environment. They learn about decomposition and how dead animals help soil and plants grow. They work to keep forests and ecosystems healthy for all living things.

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- Average Annual Salary: $73,000 USD

NGSS Connections

- Performance Expectation: 1-LS1-2 Read texts and use media to determine patterns in behavior of parents and offspring that help offspring survive
- Disciplinary Core Ideas: 1-LS1.B Animals have body parts that capture and convey different kinds of information needed for growth and survival
- Crosscutting Concepts: Patterns

Science Vocabulary

* Life cycle: The stages a living thing goes through from birth to death
* Decompose: When dead things break down and become part of the soil
* Nutrients: Food that helps living things grow and stay healthy
* Ecosystem: All the living and non-living things in an area that work together
* Bacteria: Tiny living things that help break down dead plants and animals

External Resources

Children's Books:
- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia
- Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children by Bryan Mellonie

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