

Web of Life Activity

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

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 students 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?

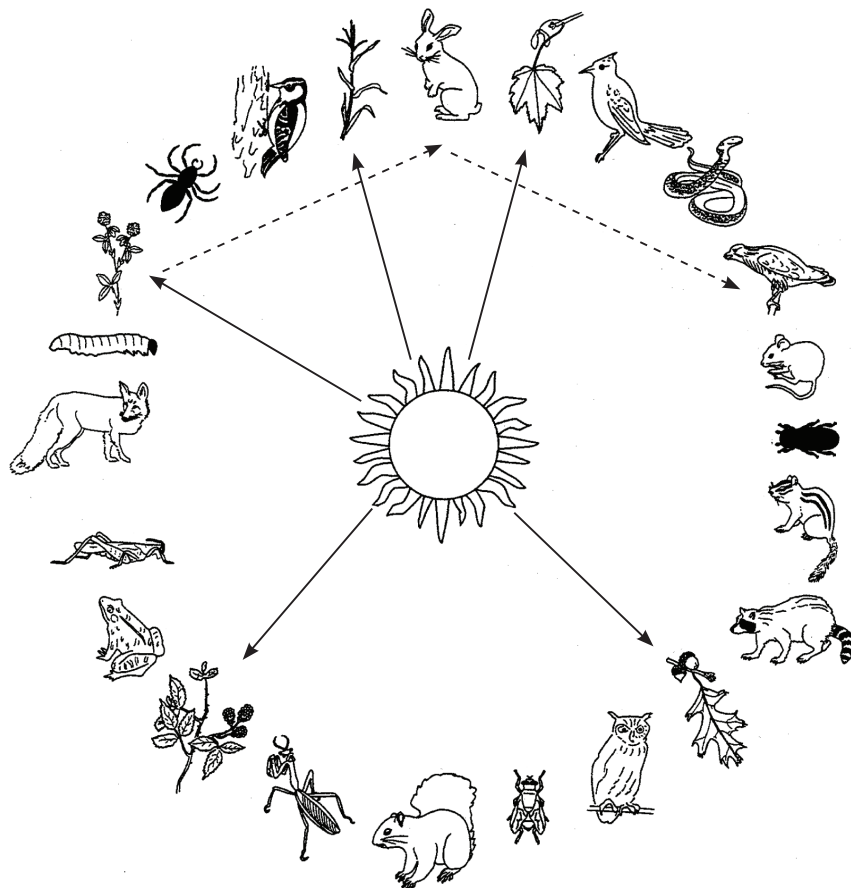
- 3** How might people affect this ecosystem?

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Have students 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 below 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



Refer to Project Learning Tree's *Energy in Ecosystems* e-unit for more hands-on “web of life” activities for students that show how all living things are connected to others. Go to www.plt.org/curriculum/e-unit/energy-in-ecosystems/.