

Die and Decay

Overview Students will create a skit to demonstrate the stages of death and decay of living organisms. They will use props collected from the schoolyard in their skits.

Lesson Planner

Time Required	1 hour
Key Concepts/Terms	Organism, Decay, Decomposer, Once-Living
Prerequisites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge of expectations for outdoor classroom conduct.
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10-minute field study outside• Remainder of lesson inside

Standards MDSC 3rd Grade Science

3.E.1.c. Students will observe and record the sequence of changes that occur to plants and animals that die and decay.

Objectives Students will collect once-living organisms in order to create and perform a skit that demonstrates how a living organism dies and decays.

Materials Required

- Science textbook
- Rubric to score skits
- Samples of decaying wood (and/or other organisms)

Background Information

The following is information from the Scott Foresman, Grade 3 Science Textbook, page 118

Mushrooms and other decomposers feed on the dead trees. A decomposer is a living thing that breaks down waste and living things that have died. This action is called decay. Decay returns certain materials to the soil. The trees had taken these materials from the soil in order to grow. Decomposers cause the dead tree to slowly crumble into the soil.

Procedure

Follow the steps in the table below to conduct the activity. **Sentences in bold are suggestions for what teachers might say to students.** *Items in italics are possible teacher answers to questions.*

Phase	Step	Action
Engage	1	<u>Samples of Decaying Wood</u> (5 minutes)
		Show students samples of decaying wood. Some may have fungi on them. Discuss what is happening to the wood. It is "once living." Now it is dead. Soon it will go back to soil for new living things to grow and be consumed and die.

Explore	2	<p><u>Ten Minute Exercise</u>: Introduction to concept maps/outdoor learning.</p> <p>If students are unfamiliar with concept maps and/or using the schoolyard as a classroom, begin by creating a concept map together as a class to go over rules and expectations for learning outside.</p> <p>As you go through the concept map, think aloud for how you are choosing where to draw your bubbles to connect different concepts on the map. For instance,</p> <p>“I am going to write the idea first and then put a bubble around it to make sure my bubble isn’t too big or too small for my information.”</p> <p>Or</p> <p>“I am going to connect this idea to that one instead of the main topic since they are related.”</p> <p>Or</p> <p>“That’s a good idea! Where would you connect that idea on our concept map?”</p> <p>Have in mind some expectations for outdoor learning specific to your schoolyard that you want to be sure students include. For instance,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Regular school rules still apply (respect each other, listen to the speaker, follow directions, etc.)</i> • <i>No yelling, screaming, tapping on/waving into windows that will disrupt class learning inside the school building.</i> • <i>“Look, learn, and let go” when you see insects.</i>
Explore	3	<p><u>Directions</u> (5 minutes)</p> <p>When outside, collect 1-2 items that are once living that will decay.</p>

	4	<u>10-Minute Field Study</u> Bring students outside. Keep track of the time, giving students ample warning for when it's time to head back in. Give students prompting if needed to find once-living organisms.
Explain	5	<u>Reading</u> (10 minutes) Once back in the classroom, have students read in their textbook pages 118-119 about how organisms die and decay.
	6	<u>Ordering</u> (5 minutes) In groups, ask students to place in order a set of cards to show the sequence of an organism dying and decaying. Check student answers.
Elaborate	7	<u>Skits</u> (10 min to prepare; 10 min to perform) Have the groups create short skits to show an organism dying and decaying. Each skit must use at least one once living organism that was collected from the schoolyard
Evaluate	8	Evaluate the accuracy of the students' skit. Do they understand the order in which organisms die and decay?

Vocabulary Understanding of the following terms is required in this activity.

Term	Definition
Organism	A living thing.
Decay	To break down, or rot.
Decomposer	A living thing that breaks down waste and things that have died.
Once-Living	An organism that is no longer alive.

Written by Christa Haverly



Rubric for Dead and Decaying Skits

Name: _____

Date: _____

Performance Criteria	Points Possible	Points Earned
The student got along with others in the group.	5	
The student followed the teacher's directions.	5	
The student listened to others and their ideas.	5	
The group finished on time.	5	
The order of death and decay in the skit is accurate.	10	
Total	30	

Rubric for Dead and Decaying Skits

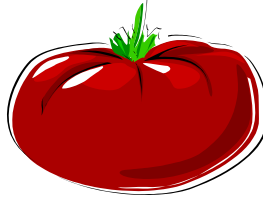
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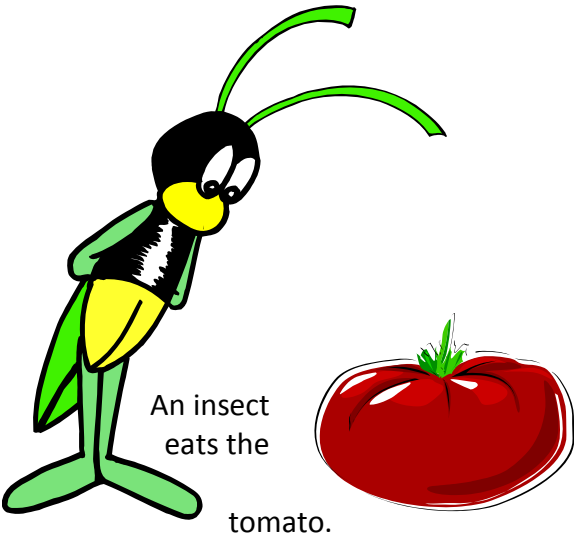
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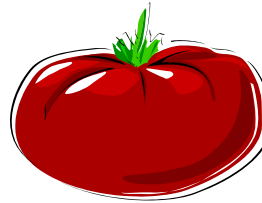
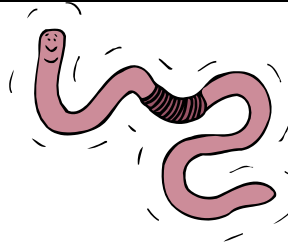
A tomato plant grows.



A tomato falls to the ground.



An insect eats the tomato.



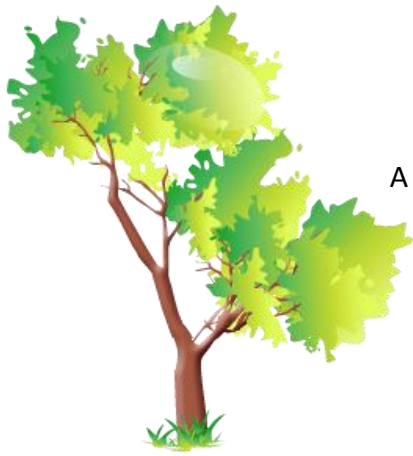
A worm eats the tomato.



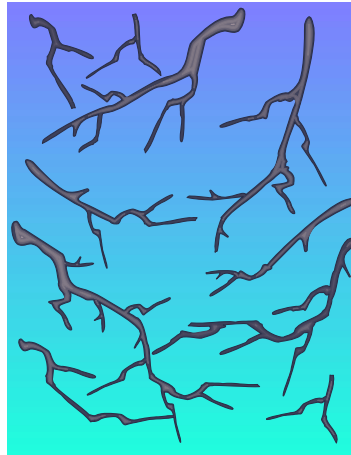
New soil is formed.



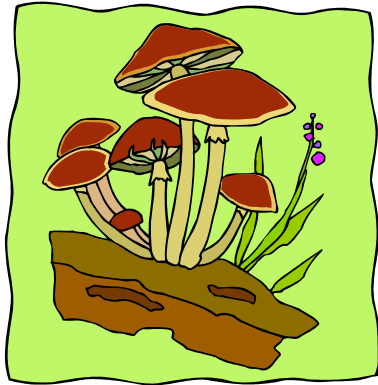
A tomato plant grows.



A tree grows.



Branches fall to the ground after a storm.



Mushrooms grow on the branches.



A tree grows.



New soil is formed.



A squirrel is storing acorns.



While crossing the street, the squirrel is hit by a car!



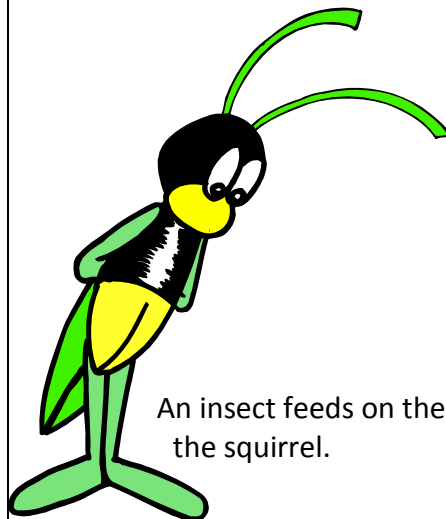
A turkey vulture feeds on the dead squirrel and leaves behind droppings.



An oak tree grows that produces acorns.



New soil is formed.



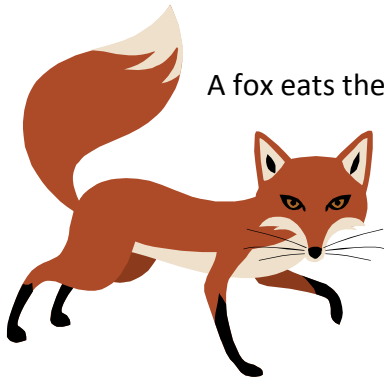
An insect feeds on the remains of the squirrel.



A bird is singing in a tree.



The bird dies in the winter.



A fox eats the bird.



The fox excretes (poops!).



New soil is formed.



New plants grow.



Flowers grow in a field.



A flower is picked and dropped on the ground.



A worm eats the flower and leaves behind castings (worm poop).



New soil is formed.



New plants grow.