

living-things

Is it living or non-living?

Lesson at a glance

Open with a potted plant beside a toy car and ask which is alive. Share short board definitions of living and non-living, then model one sort. Groups handle a core tray set gently, sort reals and photo cards into living and non-living hoops with a spoken reason, then check trickier cards on the sorting-tree interactive. Pupils draw or label at least two items per group in the Investigation Journal and close by naming classroom examples and the clues they used.

Learning objectives

- Sort familiar things into living and non-living groups with a reason
- Talk about simple clues that something is alive, such as growing or needing food and water

Before the bell – prep

Print one photo-card set per group (snail, daisy, woodlouse, plastic leaf, wooden block). Set trays with plant, stone, toy car, teddy, pencil plus two labelled hoops. Optional live snail/woodlouse in a ventilated tub with damp litter — collect just before, return outdoors after. Full photo set works if reals are scarce.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
sorting tray with real objects (small potted plant, stone, toy car, teddy or soft toy, pencil)	1	group	classroom	photo cards only if real objects are scarce, plus one shared class plant and stone
living and non-living photo cards (snail, daisy, woodlouse, plastic leaf, wooden block)	1	group	classroom	simple hand-drawn picture cards with the same names
sorting hoops or labelled table spaces (living / non-living)	2	group	classroom	two sheets of paper or two chalk circles on the floor labelled living and non-living
live snail or woodlouse in a ventilated tub with a little damp leaf litter	1	class	outdoors	snail or woodlouse photo card only if no live minibeast is available
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	classroom	a blank page folded in half and labelled living / non-living



Safety watch-point

Gentle minibeast handling only — no poking. Hands washed after tray work and before journal; return live snails/woodlice outdoors after the lesson.

Teaching moves

- **Getting Started:** Show the plant and toy car side by side only — no trays yet. Take a few quick guesses; accept every idea kindly. Key question: which one is alive, and what makes you think that?
- **Living or non-living?:** Board the short lines only: living grows and needs food and water; non-living does not. Hold up the same plant and car and model once: plant is living because it grows and needs water; car is non-living because it never grows or needs a drink.
- **Look and handle carefully:** State the inventory rule once: each thing once only; reals first. Model gentle hands, then let pupils handle only the core set (plant, stone, toy or teddy, plastic-leaf card, snail/woodlouse card or live minibeast). Circulate with: What do you notice? Does it grow? Does it need water? No hoops or journal yet.
- **Sort into living and non-living:** Open both hoops and sort the full set. Require a spoken reason for each place. If groups stall on the plastic leaf, wooden block or teddy, pause and model one together. Revoice push-only movement and once-living wood on the spot.
- **Sort on the board:** Trays and minibeast aside; quick handwash first. Drive the sorting-tree interactive with plant, snail, woodlouse, stone, toy car, teddy, plastic leaf and wooden block. Place a card only after a reason. Write the journal word bank while they sort: living, non-living, plant, snail, stone, toy, grows, water.
- **Record your sort:** Issue the Investigation Journal page with clean hands. Keep the board sort and word bank visible. Pupils draw or label at least two living and two non-living items from the board, bank or tray memory — paper only, no typing.
- **How can we tell?:** Display-only talk. Draw out clues: grows, needs food or water, moves by itself, stays the same. Scan the room together — sill plant living; chair and clock non-living. Return any minibeast outdoors and top up handwash if needed.

What it should show

Living hoop: plant, daisy, snail, woodlouse. Non-living: stone, toy car, teddy, pencil, plastic leaf, wooden block. A teddy or plastic leaf in living usually means “looks real”; a toy car there usually means “it moves when we push.” Revoice the clue and re-sort that one item together.



Misconceptions & interventions

- **“The teddy / plastic leaf is living — it looks like a real animal or leaf.”** — Hold the teddy beside the plant (or live minibeast). Ask which grows or needs water. Revoice: we use clues like growing and needing food or water, not only how it looks.
- **“The toy car is living because it moves.”** — Push the car, then contrast with a snail or woodlouse card. Say: if it only moves when we push, wind or switch it, that is not moving by itself — sort it non-living.
- **“The pencil or wooden block is living because it came from a tree.”** — Agree it was once part of a living tree, then ask whether it grows or needs food or water now. Sort as non-living because those clues have stopped.

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Offer stems: I think it is living because... / I think it is non-living because... Pair at the teacher table with the plant vs stone as the first two sorts.	• After the hoop sort, hunt one extra classroom example for each group and say the clue used.	• Lead the class rethink on one disputed card (plastic leaf or wooden block) and explain why look-alikes need the grow/need-water clues.

Cross-curricular hook

Oral language: pupils justify each sort with because-clauses using the board word bank.