

living-things

Sorting plants and animals with a reason

Lesson at a glance

Open by holding up contrasting nature photo cards (daisy, robin and more from garden and yard) and asking what is the same and different, without naming plant or animal yet. Introduce sort, plant and animal, then name all ten cards together before any grouping. Model the plant-or-animal sort on the picture-sort interactive, then groups sort real cards into hoops twice — plant/animal, then animals with legs/no legs — saying why each time. Close on the Investigation Journal page with drawings and a partner reason.

Learning objectives

- Sort living-thing cards into plants and animals and say the reason
- Do a second sort of animals into with legs and no legs
- Say the sorting reason for each sort in their own words

Before the bell – prep

Print one set of the ten nature photo cards per group the day before (daisy, oak tree, grass, bluebell, robin, frog, spider, ladybird, snail, worm). Lay out two hoops per group with plant/animal labels ready, plus a spare pair labelled has legs / no legs.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
nature photo cards (daisy, oak tree, grass, bluebell, robin, frog, spider, ladybird, snail, worm)	1	group	provided printable	cut pictures of the same plants and animals from old magazines or simple drawings on scrap card
sorting hoops	2	group	classroom	two labelled trays or two large circles of string on the floor
picture label cards (plant, animal, has legs, no legs)	1	group	provided printable	sticky notes with a simple picture drawn for each group

Safety watch-point

Supervise hoop edges and card handling on the carpet so little hands do not slip or scuffle over shared sets.

**Teaching moves**

- **Getting Started:** Hold up two contrasting printed cards so everyone can see — not on the board. Ask what is the same and what is different. Take every answer; hold back the words plant and animal so children look at the cards first.
- **Today's Words:** Keep the board to three short lines: sort, plant, animal. Read each word, point to a real card, and stress that when we sort we always say why.
- **Look Carefully:** Spread one set face up on the carpet. Name every card together before sorting begins. Ask only noticing questions — leaves, flowers, legs, shell, feelers — and do not start the hoop sort yet.
- **Board Sort: Plant or Animal:** Open the picture-sort interactive in explore mode. Invite children to call out which hoop each card belongs in while you drag. A wrong hoop is a conversation: ask why it goes there, and keep moving until all ten are placed.
- **Sort with the Hoops:** Groups of four to six with one card set and two hoops. Run plant or animal first until every child has said a reason at least once. Clear plants aside, switch labels to has legs / no legs, and sort the animals only. Watch snail, worm, oak tree and robin.
- **Draw Our Sort:** Hand out the Investigation Journal page and give one instruction at a time: draw plants and animals, then mark legs/no legs, then tell a partner why. Circulate asking why that one goes there; scribe a short reason for children who cannot yet write.
- **Why Did We Sort That Way?:** Ask one recall question at a time: first reason, then second reason for the animals. End by inviting the class to echo once: scientists sort living things into groups to learn about them, just like we did.

What it should show

Most groups place daisy, oak tree, grass and bluebell as plants, and robin, frog, spider, ladybird, snail and worm as animals. Second sort: robin, frog, spider, ladybird with legs; snail and worm with no legs. Common mix-ups are snail (slow/shell so 'not an animal'), worm (no legs so unsure), and oak tree (big, so maybe not a plant) — revoice grows from the ground / can move.

Misconceptions & interventions

- **A snail is not an animal because it is slow or has a shell.** — Hold up the snail card beside a plant card. Ask: does it grow from the ground, or can it move on its own? Affirm it moves, so it is an animal — then place it in the no-legs hoop.
- **A tree is not a plant, or a bird has no legs because it has wings.** — Point to the oak-tree card: trees grow from the ground, so plant. Point to the robin: birds have two legs as well as wings — into has legs.

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Let the child point to the hoop while you voice the reason aloud; one clear sort plus a spoken reason is enough if drawing is slow.	• Prompt a second spoken reason after the legs sort: why do snail and worm go together?	• Invite a third sorting idea aloud (What else could we sort by?) without a new hoop set, still using the same cards.

Cross-curricular hook

Links to Aistear sorting play and oral language — children practise because-sentences when they say each sorting reason.