

living-things

Is it living or non-living?

Lesson at a glance

Open with a real potted plant beside a toy car and ask which is alive. Model the two board definitions, then groups gently handle a core tray set before sorting the full set of reals and photo cards into living and non-living hoops with a spoken reason. Drive the sorting-tree interactive on the six catch-out items (seed, apple, feather, wooden spoon, plant, stone). Pupils draw or label at least two of each group on the Investigation Journal page, then scan the classroom for living and non-living examples.

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 living/non-living photo-card set per group the day before. Set one tray per group: plant, stone, toy car, teddy, pencil plus cards for snail, daisy, woodlouse, plastic leaf, wooden block. Two labelled hoops per group. Optional live snail or woodlouse in a ventilated tub with damp leaf litter – collect just before, return outdoors after.

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	provided printable	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	provided printable	a blank page folded in half and labelled living / non-living

Safety watch-point

Gentle minibeast handling only — no poking. Wash hands after tray work and before journal recording; return any live snail or woodlouse 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 on which is alive and why. Accept every idea kindly; curiosity first, full answer later.
- **Living or non-living?:** Keep only the two short board definitions up. Hold the same plant and car and model aloud in about one minute: plant is living because it grows and needs water; car is non-living because it never grows or needs a drink. Skip the fuller script unless the class needs another pass.
- **Look and handle carefully:** State the inventory rule once: each thing appears once, reads first, cards fill gaps. Model gentle hands, then limit handling to the core set (plant, stone, toy car or teddy, plastic leaf card, snail/woodlouse card or live minibeast). Circulate asking what they notice about growing and needing water — no hoop sorting yet.
- **Sort into living and non-living:** Hand out two labelled living/non-living hoops. Pupils sort the full set and say a simple reason for each. If groups disagree, pause and model one tricky item (plastic leaf, wooden block or teddy) with the class. Watch for placing into hoops, clue-linked reasons, and gentle minibeast handling.
- **The ones that catch you out:** Open the sorting-tree interactive in explore mode and drive it yourself while the class calls out. Do not re-sort the tray. Push on reasons — what would we have to see to be sure? — especially on the seed and the still plant.
- **Record your sort:** Confirm hands are washed after tray tidy, then issue the Investigation Journal page. Keep the board sort and word bank (living, non-living, plant, snail, stone, toy, grows, water) in view. Pupils draw or label at least two things in each group from the board, word bank and tray memory.
- **How can we tell?:** Revoice pupil clues with the lesson words living and non-living. Ask which sort was trickiest, then scan the room together — plant on the sill living, chair and clock non-living. Return any minibeast outdoors and offer a top-up handwash if needed.

What it should show

Most groups place plant, daisy, snail and woodlouse as living, and stone, toy car, teddy, pencil, plastic leaf and wooden block as non-living. Common mix-ups: teddy or toy car sorted living because it looks or moves like an animal; plastic leaf sorted living because it is green; seed called non-living because it is still. Affirm clue talk (grows, needs water, moves by itself) over looks alone.

Misconceptions & interventions

- **A toy animal or teddy is living because it looks like a real animal.** — Hold the teddy beside the plant or snail card and ask which grows or needs food and water. Revoice: we sort by clues, not only by looks.
- **A toy car is living because it moves when we push or wind it.** — Compare with the snail or woodlouse: if it only moves when we push, wind or switch it, that is not moving by itself.
- **A pencil or wooden block is living because it came from a tree.** — Accept that it was once part of a living tree, then revoice: now it does not grow or need food or water, so we sort it non-living.



Lesson 2

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Offer the sentence stems I think it is living because... / I think it is non-living because... and sit with the teacher table for the first two hoop placements. • Allow drawing only on the Investigation Journal page using the word bank and board sort still on display.	• Prompt a second reason for one tricky item (plastic leaf or teddy) before it goes in a hoop. • If time allows, add one classroom find of their own to each side of the journal page.	• Confident groups hunt one extra classroom example for each hoop at the end of the sort and say the clue they used. • Ask them to explain why the seed or wooden spoon on the sorting-tree interactive made the group change its mind.

Cross-curricular hook

Link to oral language: pupils rehearse full because-sentences when justifying each hoop placement to their group.

