

living-things

Living, once-living or never-living?

Lesson at a glance

Uncover a tray holding a plant, snail photo, leaf, feather, stone and plastic toy and ask which are alive now, used to be, or never were. Name the three groups with one concrete example each, then groups sort every tray item into labelled hoops, justifying with noticing clues. A shared magnifier look and the sorting-tree interactive tackle harder processed items (wooden spoon, cotton, paper). Pupils record one example and one clue per group on the Investigation Journal page.

Learning objectives

- Sort objects into living, once-living and never-living using observable features
- Justify each sort with evidence from careful noticing

Before the bell – prep

Night before: one tray per group (potted plant or cutting, snail photo card, fallen leaf, feather, stone, plastic toy) plus three labelled hoops or paper circles (Living / Once-living / Never-living). Default snail is a photo card; optional shared live snail in a clear pot. One shared magnifier at the front. Open the sorting-tree interactive ready in explore mode.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
sorting tray items (small potted plant or cutting in water, fallen leaf, feather, stone, plastic toy, snail photo card)	1	group	classroom	picture cards of the same six items if real objects are short
snail photo card (optional: one shared live snail in a clear pot with a damp leaf for the class)	1	group	classroom	a clear snail photo on the IWB for the whole class
labelled sorting hoops or large paper circles (Living, Once-living, Never-living)	3	group	classroom	three labelled areas of desk marked with masking tape
magnifying glass	2	group	school kit	clear plastic jar lid used as a simple lens, or careful looking without a magnifier
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	provided printable	plain paper folded into three labelled columns



Safety watch-point

If using a live snail: one child holds the pot still, no poking, return outside after the lesson, wash hands after snail pot and natural items.

Teaching moves

- **Getting Started:** Keep the tray covered until you hold it up. Lift a surprising pair (leaf beside plastic toy) and ask whether they are the same kind of thing. Name talk partners before the whisper so every child turns. Listen for 'moving = living, still = not' — do not correct yet.
- **Three groups to sort into:** Attach each group name to one object you hold: plant = living, dry leaf = once-living, stone = never-living. Model the noticing cycle aloud on the leaf (predict, look, decide). Take two quick call-outs, then move straight to the tray sort.
- **Sort the tray:** Groups of 3–4 get one tray and three labelled hoops. Say clearly: we sort the animal in the picture, not the card. Circulate asking 'What did you notice that made you put it there?' If a leaf lands in living, ask whether it is growing now.
- **Look carefully:** Run one shared magnifier look at the front: snail photo (or live pot) beside the plastic toy. Take two or three spoken clues only — no writing yet. Prompt smooth, rough, shiny, veins, shell shape. Keep inside five minutes.
- **Harder than they look:** Drive the sorting-tree interactive yourself in explore mode; class calls out. Do not re-sort the tray. Lean on the two questions: alive right now? came from something alive? Let the wooden spoon and seashell disagreements run — revoice good reasons either way.
- **Record our sorts:** Hand out the Investigation Journal page only now. One example and one clue per group is enough. Say the stems aloud: 'It is living/once-living/never-living because...' Offer board picture labels for emerging writers.
- **Share what we sorted:** Two–three minutes: one tricky sort with a revoiced reason, then a quick classroom hunt (wooden pencil, paper, wool; plastic ruler or glass). If someone calls the pencil living, ask whether it is growing or needing water now. Finish the talk before pack-up.

What it should show

Tray sort: plant and snail → living; leaf and feather → once-living; stone and plastic toy → never-living. On the interactive, wooden spoon, cotton sock, paper and leather shoe → once-living; plastic bottle → never-living; seashell may split either way if the reason is sound. A leaf in living usually means the child thinks 'from a plant' equals still alive — ask if it is growing now.



Misconceptions & interventions

- **‘The fallen leaf is living because it came from a plant.’** — Hold the dry leaf and ask: is it green, soft, or growing now? Revoice: living means alive right now; once-living means it used to be part of something alive.
- **‘The stone is once-living because it is natural / from outside.’** — Contrast the stone with the feather: which came from an animal or plant? Never-living was never part of a living thing — natural does not mean once-living.
- **‘The wooden spoon is never-living because a person made it.’** — Ask the second question: did it come from something that was alive? Wood comes from a tree, so the spoon is once-living even though it is man-made.

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Start the tray with only the plant and the stone (clear contrast) before adding the other four items. • Offer board picture labels to copy onto the Investigation Journal page; one example per group is enough.	• Push for a noticing clue on every placement: moves, grows, came from a plant or animal, never was alive. • On the interactive, ask them to say which of the two questions decided the wooden spoon.	• Add one extra classroom object they choose and justify its group with a clue. • Defend the seashell placement using both questions, and say what would change their mind.

Cross-curricular hook

English oral language: rehearse the because-stems aloud before writing the one justifying clue on the journal page.