

living-things

An animal's life cycle

Lesson at a glance

Open on one hook photo of a tiny egg (Small Tortoiseshell on nettle or frogspawn) and wonder what it becomes. Name life cycle and stage, then groups order butterfly cards first, frog cards second, on a start-to-finish strip. The flow-builder plants one wrong butterfly stage for the class to catch and justify. Both cycles sit side by side for same/different talk, then pupils draw and label four stages of one animal in the Investigation Journal.

Learning objectives

- Order the stages of an animal life cycle and say what changes at each stage
- Compare life cycles of two Irish animals (butterfly and frog)

Before the bell – prep

Print and cut one butterfly set and one frog set per group the day before; keep sets in separate piles. Lay a paper strip or clear table line per group. Have the hook egg/frogspawn photo and the flow-builder ready with chrysalis placed before caterpillar.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
hook picture card (butterfly egg or frogspawn photo)	1	class	provided printable	a clear textbook or library photo of butterfly eggs or frogspawn held up for the class
butterfly life-cycle cards (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, adult butterfly)	1	group	provided printable	hand-drawn simple stage pictures on sticky notes
frog life-cycle cards (frogspawn, tadpole, froglet, adult frog)	1	group	provided printable	hand-drawn simple stage pictures on sticky notes
sequencing strip or clear table space for ordering cards	1	group	classroom	a strip of scrap paper or the desk edge as a start line
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	provided printable	plain paper for a labelled life-cycle drawing



Safety watch-point

Card and paper activity only. No living animals required. If a pupil later handles minibeasts or pond life outdoors, return them gently and wash hands; that is not needed in this lesson.

Teaching moves

- **Getting Started:** Hold up only the single hook card. Ask one wonder question — what might this tiny egg become? — and capture two or three ideas on the board. Do not lay out stage cards or name the full cycle yet.
- **What is a life cycle?:** Put life cycle and stage on the board with the short definitions. Think aloud with the cards in hand: egg first, then something that crawls, then a change stage, then the adult that lays eggs again. Keep change words gentle — grow, change, become.
- **Order the life-cycle cards:** Quick picture-walk each stage name once, then all groups start with butterfly only; frog stays face down. Circulate asking what is different at this stage and where it lives. If two cards are reversed, have them tell the story from the start rather than giving the order.
- **Catch the wrong stage:** Open the flow-builder with chrysalis before caterpillar already planted. Do not rebuild from scratch — ask them to find the error and say why a real butterfly could not do it that way. Fix only after the reason is spoken aloud. Leave physical butterfly strips on tables for the later compare.
- **Two cycles side by side:** Build the frog cycle briskly on the board, then leave both cycles side by side. Push the compare, not another build: both start with an egg and loop back; only the butterfly has a still-change stage. Accept “frog changes slowly, butterfly all at once” as a strong answer.
- **Draw a life cycle:** Write one model sentence on the board first (The tadpole grows back legs). Leave stage words visible. Must-do is four stages drawn in order and labelled; stretch is one short change sentence on a different pair. Keep the full drawing time in class — this is not homework.
- **Same, different, and in the garden:** Show only one prompt at a time. Priority if tight: same, then different. Draw out shared egg-to-adult loop versus chrysalis versus gradual tadpole change. Outdoor noticing (nettles, buddleia, school pond) only if time remains.

What it should show

Butterfly order: egg → caterpillar → chrysalis → adult. Frog order: frogspawn → tadpole → froglet → adult. Same: both begin with an egg and end with an adult that restarts the cycle. Different: chrysalis is a still full-body change; tadpole changes gradually while swimming. A mixed-up chrysalis/caterpillar usually means the pupil treats them as separate animals — retell as one animal changing shape.



Misconceptions & interventions

- **The chrysalis is just sleeping, or the caterpillar and the butterfly are two different animals.**
— Point to the card strip and say it is the same animal changing shape. Trace egg → caterpillar → chrysalis → adult with a finger and revoice: inside the chrysalis its body changes, then the adult comes out.
- **Pupils put chrysalis before caterpillar because the hard case looks like it should come early.**
— Ask where the caterpillar would come from if the chrysalis were first, and what has to eat and grow before the big change. Press for the reason before you fix the flow-builder.
- **Frogspawn and tadpole get swapped, or froglet is treated as a different species from the adult frog.** — Have the group tell the pond story aloud: jelly eggs in water, swimming tail, legs growing and tail shortening, then adult on land and water. Keep frog and butterfly piles separate so cards do not cross.

Differentiation

- {'emerging': ['Stay with the butterfly set only if time is tight; accept clear labels on rough drawings as the full must-do.', 'Pair at the teacher table and retell the four butterfly cards in order before they draw.'], 'developing': ['Open the frog set once the butterfly line is stable and name one change between two stages.', 'Add the short Investigation Journal sentence using the board model but on a different pair of stages.'], 'proficient': ['Which stage shows the biggest change of body shape, and how do you know?', 'Add arrows and a sentence that the adult restarts the cycle; compare chrysalis with froglet in one spoken line.']}

Cross-curricular hook

Link to local Irish wildlife: Small Tortoiseshell on nettles, frogspawn in a spring ditch or school pond — SESE Geography habitats.