

living-things

What do living things do?

Lesson at a glance

Open with a live snail (or woodlouse) beside a toy car and ask which is alive and what the living one can do. Children whisper predictions, then watch two stations in an inner/outer ring: a potted plant beside a paper leaf, and the minibeast beside a toy. Sort six action cards into Living things can... versus Needs a person..., then draw one clear difference on the Investigation Journal page. Close with a show-of-hands on what they actually saw — and how we might check growth over time.

Learning objectives

- Identify what living things can do, such as grow, need food or water, and move or change
- Compare a living thing with a non-living object and record one clear difference

Before the bell – prep

Day before: gather one small potted plant, a paper leaf or fabric scrap, a clear tub with a snail or woodlouse, and a toy car or plastic brick. Print or write the six action cards. Set two covered stations so the class first only sees the snail and toy. Plan a safe outdoor release spot for the creature after the lesson.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
snail or woodlouse in a clear tub with air holes and a little damp leaf litter	1	class	outdoors	a second small potted plant if no minibeast is available
small potted plant	1	class	classroom	any safe leafy plant the school already keeps; a fresh cut leaf standing in water only as a last resort (then stress need for water and staying green, not growth or movement)
non-living comparison objects (toy car or plastic brick, pencil or stone, paper leaf or fabric scrap)	1	class	classroom	any safe classroom objects that cannot grow or move alone
action word cards for the sort (grow, need water or food, move by itself, change, stay the same size, only moves when pushed)	1	class	provided printable	write the six actions on the board as two lists
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	provided printable	plain paper with two boxes labelled living and object

Safety watch-point

Lids stay on the minibeast tub unless you open briefly; children do not handle the creature. Return it outdoors after. No eating plant material; wash hands after stations.

Teaching moves

- **Getting Started:** Show only the snail tub and one toy; keep stations covered. Take two or three quick ideas on which is alive and what the living one can do. Hold back the full list of actions — children will gather those at the stations.
- **What do we think living things do?:** Partner whisper, then revoice ideas into simple actions: grow, need food or water, move by themselves, change. If someone calls the toy living because it moves, say it only moves when a person pushes it. Keep talk on what they already think, not on the stations yet.
- **Watch and compare at stations:** Model one full look first, then run the two-ring pattern: half the class per station, inner ring of 4–6 at the table, outer ring watching; swap rings after about 2 minutes, then swap halves after about 4. Lids stay on unless you open briefly; children do not handle the creature. Talk and notice only — no writing yet. If they say nothing is happening, point to clues already there: damp soil beside dry paper, feelers or a shell beside a still toy.
- **Sort the actions:** Make two floor or board piles: Living things can... and Needs a person.... Read each action card aloud and let the class call the pile. Living pile is A–D (grow, need water or food, move by itself, change); Needs a person is E–F (stay the same size, only moves when pushed). Correct gently and revoice.
- **Record your comparison:** Investigation Journal only. Offer the stem: The living thing can... The object never.... Look for a real action (grows, needs water, moves, changes) linked to living versus non-living, not only colour or size.
- **Which ones did we see?:** Display-only, about four minutes. Show of hands on grow, need food or water, move or change — most saw movement or water, almost nobody saw growing. That gap is the point. Ask how we could check whether the plant grows (come back tomorrow, mark height, take a photo). Praise we did not see it, so we are not sure yet.

What it should show

Children typically notice damp soil, a green stem or leaves, feelers, legs, a shell, or slow minibeast movement beside a still, dry object. Journal differences name grow, need water or food, move or change — not only colour. Almost nobody will see growth in twelve minutes; affirm slow clues and waiting to look again. If a cut leaf in water is the only plant option, steer only to needing water and staying green — never claim growth or self-movement.

Misconceptions & interventions

- **The toy is living because it can move / it has eyes.** — Hold the toy still, then push it once. Say it only moves when a person pushes it; the snail can creep or change its feelers on its own.
- **Nothing is happening — so it isn't living.** — Point to clues already there: damp soil beside dry paper, feelers or a shell beside a still toy. Living clues can be slow or already present without a big action in four minutes.
- **The plant must eat food the way an animal does.** — Revoice simply: animals take in food; plants take in water (and light) to stay green and well. Keep pupil language on need water or food without forcing the full plant-food story.



Lesson 3

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Sit at the teacher table for the journal stem spoken aloud: The living thing can... The object never...; accept a drawing with one dictated word. • During card sort, offer only two cards at a time and point to the matching station object.	• Prompt a second difference on the journal page, or a careful draw of leaves or feelers they actually saw. • At stations, ask Did it need anything? Did it change? to the outer ring by name.	• Ask how we could check growth over days (mark height, look again tomorrow) without adding new kit. • Invite them to spot a pupil suggestion that belongs in Needs a person... and say why.

Cross-curricular hook

Pairs with Aistear/oral language: partner whispers and the stem The living thing can... The object never... before drawing.

