

Living Things

Classifying with our own criteria

Lesson at a glance

Open with seven Irish wildlife photo cards (badger, heron, earthworm, bee, fern, oak, frog) and ask what features could sort them. Name classify and criteria with a live plant/animal split, then walk five minibeasts down a branching key on the IWB, one yes-or-no question at a time, until each reaches its own name. Groups choose criteria and split their seven cards pile by pile into a yes/no key on one master A4 sheet, and swap as Hiders and Followers to identify a mystery specimen and rewrite one weak question. Close by keying out three mystery minibeasts on the board, then the frog.

Learning objectives

- Classify Irish plants and animals using self-chosen criteria and justify the groupings
- Build a multi-step branching key that another group can follow
- Use a key to identify a mystery specimen and refine questions that do not split the set cleanly

Before the bell: prep

Print one full set of the seven Irish wildlife photo cards per group; the five minibeasts for the model are on screen, in the sorting tree interactive. Stack blank A4 (one master key sheet per group) and spare pencils, and print an Investigation Journal page per pupil for the criteria, Question 1 and one path of the key.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
Irish wildlife photo cards (badger, heron, earthworm, bee, fern, oak, frog)	1	group	provided printable	simple line drawings or magazine cut-outs of the same seven living things, labelled on the back
A4 plain or ruled paper (master branching-key sheet)	1	group	classroom	any spare ruled page or the back of scrap paper large enough for both paths
pencils	1	pupil	classroom	none needed

Safety watch-point

No significant hazard: card and paper work only. Keep photo-card sets complete at pack-away so the next class has all seven specimens.

**Teaching moves**

- **What does classify mean?:** Board only two words: classify, then criteria. Do the plant/animal split with the seven cards in view before naming criteria as 'the feature we just used'. Push vague offers like 'big' or 'nice' back toward features you can check by looking.
- **Model a branching key:** Walk each minibeast down the key on the IWB: tap a card, ask the class each question, tap Yes or No, and the card moves on until it reaches its own name. Show that each question takes one out and every path ends on one name, then name it a branching key. Close on what makes a good question: a sure yes or no you can check by looking.
- **Choose criteria and first groups:** One set of seven cards per group. Criteria stay inside the four board families. If diet comes first, ask where oak and fern sit and steer to plant/animal first; badger and earthworm break the plant-eater/animal-eater binary: switch that pile to legs, habitat or movement.
- **Build our multi-step key:** One scribe, one master A4, copying the shape of the minibeast tree on the board. Groups split the real cards as they write: Question 1 and its two piles (2 min), split the YES pile again and again until each card is alone (4 min), the same for the NO pile (4 min), then read it aloud and check (2 min). Reject 'Is it big/nice/weird?'; test with 'If I have never seen your cards, can I still follow this?'
- **Mystery specimen swap:** Pair groups; put Hiders/Followers roles on the IWB and leave them up. Check each master has named ends on both sides of Q1 before the follow starts. Give not-yet pairs two minutes with a stem question. One improved question only after the check; treat a wrong path as useful data.
- **Board key check:** The sorting tree checks three mystery cards walked down the same key: no legs and a shell reaches snail; six legs, no wings reaches ant; hard spotty wing cases reaches ladybird. Then key the frog with true yes/no only: 'Is it a plant?' (no), 'Does it have legs?' (yes), 'Does it have smooth, wet-looking skin?' (yes) → frog. Do not use either/or wording.

What it should show

A usable master A4 splits every pile until each living thing ends alone at its own name: all seven is the aim, and five named ends is enough for the swap. Followers should reach the hidden card's name without guessing; failures usually trace to vague questions ('Is it big?') or a diet fork that leaves oak, fern, badger or earthworm with nowhere to sit: rewrite to a look-checkable feature.



Misconceptions & interventions

- **‘Is it big?’ or ‘Is it nice?’ is a fair sorting question.** Ask ‘Big compared with what?’ and hold two cards side by side. Push for a feature you can check by looking: legs or no legs, plant or animal, water or land.
- **Diet can be the first split for the whole set, including oak and fern.** Ask ‘Where do oak and fern go on that menu?’ Steer to plant or animal first; use diet only inside a fitting animal branch (e.g. heron vs bee).
- **A branching key can stop at unnamed piles or use either/or wording.** Show the tree on the board: every path ends on one name, never on a pile. Rephrase ‘plant or animal?’ as the yes/no ‘Is it a plant?’

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Offer only two starter criteria (plant or animal; legs or no legs) and accept labelled end groups briefly, then push to names before the swap. • Give a stem Q1 (‘Is it a plant?’ or ‘Does it have legs?’) so both paths get at least one named end.	• Re-sort the same seven with a different criterion and say which first split felt cleaner. • After one solid follow-and-rewrite, swap Hiders/Followers if time remains.	• Push the master key on until all seven living things end alone, and check every question can be answered by looking. • Critique a partner key: which question would a stranger find hard to answer by looking, and rewrite it.

Cross-curricular hook

Links to Maths logic and sorting: each yes/no fork is a binary decision pupils can read as a simple tree diagram.