

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. In the look, groups find the clues that the leaf and the feather came from something alive (veins and a stalk, a stiff middle and soft sides). Then the class sorts eight harder cards on the board, such as a wooden spoon, a seashell and a sleeping hedgehog, using two questions. Pupils record the tray sort on the Investigation Journal page and match once-living things to the living things they came from.

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 magnifier at the front, and one per group if you have them to spare. Have the board sort of eight harder cards open and ready.

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
one live snail in a clear pot with a damp leaf, for the whole class to look at (optional)	1	class	school grounds	leave it out: the snail photo card on each tray is enough
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 (one at the front; one per group only if you have spares)	1	class	school kit	careful looking without a magnifier: every clue in this lesson can be seen by eye
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:** Show the clues first: trace a vein and point to the stalk on the leaf, then run a finger along the feather's stiff middle and part its soft sides. Groups then find the same clues on their own leaf and feather, and look just as closely at the stone and the toy for clues like that. Draw out that the leaf and feather show the living thing they came from but cannot grow, so they are once-living; the stone and the toy show no sign of life. Talk only, no writing yet.
- **Harder than they look:** Model the wooden spoon, then pupils drag the other seven cards into living, once-living or never-living while the class says the two key questions for each: alive right now? came from a plant or an animal? Let the seashell and robot arguments run, then settle them with the questions, and press Check at the end.
- **Record our sorts:** Hand out the Investigation Journal page only now. Pupils write the six tray things in the table, two per group, copying the names from the pictures; draw a line from each once-living thing to the living thing it came from (leaf, paper and wooden ruler all go to the tree); then write one clue, using the stem: It came from a ... because I can see ...
- **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), asking what each once-living thing came from: a tree, a sheep, a cotton plant. 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 board, the bare tree in winter, moss and sleeping hedgehog are living; the wooden spoon, paper page and seashell are once-living; the plastic bottle and wind-up robot are never-living. The seashell and the robot cause the most argument, and the two key questions settle both. A leaf in living usually means the child thinks 'from a plant' equals still alive: ask if it is growing now. On the journal page the feather goes to the bird, the leaf, paper and wooden ruler to the tree, and the wool to the sheep.

**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. • The pictures on the Investigation Journal page carry the names to copy; let them say their clue to you instead of writing it.	• 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. • Explain which of the two questions decided the seashell, and which decided the robot.

**Cross-curricular hook**

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

