

Adult Guidance

Food Chains

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Children may already be able to:

- Explain the order of the plants / animals.
- Understand what the arrow means.
- Some may have come across a food web as an extension.

Possible Barriers Here Are:

1. Lack of understanding of herbivores / omnivores / carnivores – you could potentially do some pre-task learning by asking a group to sort animals into these groups.
2. Confusion over prey / predator and producer / consumer. These are different types of labels we give to plants and animals in the food chain. The food chain should be labelled with the latter rather than the former. However, when food chains and webs are discussed in the context of habitats, whether an animal is the prey or a predator makes a difference, especially when studying the impact of the decline of a particular population.

Do not confuse the different ways of labelling the animals – i.e. producer – consumer – predator as this is not correct. Producer – primary consumer – secondary consumer is correct.

Possible Misconceptions That May Need to Be Addressed

1. Plants such as the venus flytrap may be highlighted – they are both producers and consumers. They do photosynthesis to make food like all plants but obviously trap and kill insects. The children need to understand that while in general there are common food chains (producer – consumer) it is not always that simple and the way the food chain is labelled depends on the plants and animals that form it.
2. Decomposers, Detritivores and Scavengers. Decomposers are fungi or bacteria that break down decaying plants or animals. They do not eat as they have no mouths but instead turn decaying material into liquid and absorb this. Detritivores eat decaying plant and animals. Scavengers eat dead animals and so are a type of detritivore.
3. Some children may think that all food chains end with carnivores. They do on the whole but obviously many food chains end with humans who are omnivores. So long as the children understand that food chains are not rigid they will be able to appreciate food webs more because they will understand the interactions are complex. Therefore I would not recommend moving children onto food webs until they can understand slightly more complex and /or unusual food chains.