

Dear Families,

Your child's class is starting a science unit about habitats.

The children will be asked to think about how organisms—plants, animals, fungi, and microscopic living things—survive in the places they live, and how they interact with other living things. For example, they'll learn about the animals that rely on an oak tree for food or shelter, and learn how a cactus survives in its desert climate.

During the Habitats Unit, the children will:

- Identify a habitat as the place where an organism can satisfy its survival needs.
- Explore how different organisms survive in their habitats.
- Become familiar with local habitats by learning about local birds and plants, and by finding a "special spot" for their own weekly observations of living things.
- Learn that a biome, such as a desert, prairie, or sea, is different from a habitat and is made up of many habitats.
- Design imaginary organisms that can survive in a habitat within a particular biome.
- Examine the range of the human habitat.
- Participate in an environmental stewardship project.

In addition to the work your child will do in class, you and your child can explore this rich topic together at home by:

- Occasionally reading a **science book** together that your child checks out from the class Science Center.
- Visiting the **web site** at www.sciencecompanion.com/links, if you have a computer at home with access to the Internet, to find a list of recommended web sites about habitats.
- Completing **Family Links** the teacher sends home from time to time. Each handout should be added to the back of the Habitats section of the *Family Link Notebook*, so you, your child, and the teacher can refer to it any time.

The Habitats Unit will be fun for the children. We hope some of their interest comes home so you can learn with them, and help them learn.

Sincerely,

Useful Words for Learning About Habitats

animal	A living thing that eats food, breathes, moves, senses its environment, and reproduces. An animal may have a backbone (mammals, birds, insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles) or it may not have a backbone (insects, arachnids, crustaceans, molluscs).
biome	A very large area of the world that has unique weather and plants. For example, the marine biome is salty water inhabited by marine plants (seaweed, kelp, algae, and phytoplankton) and the animals that depend on these (such as coral, marine mammals, fish, crustaceans, and zooplankton).
characteristic	Something special or distinct about a person, place, or thing that helps to identify or tell it apart from another person, place, or thing. For example, one characteristic of humans is that they can laugh.
environment	Everything that surrounds a living thing.
fungus	A living thing, such as a mushroom, mold, or yeast, that does not photosynthesize (does not use sunlight to make its own food). Instead, a fungus absorbs the food it lives on.
habitat	The place where an organism can get the things it needs to survive.
interact	To act upon one another. Since different organisms may have overlapping habitats, they interact by competing with each other, relying on each other for food or shelter, or sharing available resources.
organism	Any living thing. Organisms include plants, animals, fungi, and microscopic protists (such as amoebas and diatoms) and monera (bacteria).
plant	A living thing, usually green, that uses energy from the sun to make its own food through a process called photosynthesis.
species	A group of organisms that are the same in many ways. Members of the same species are able to produce offspring that are also able to produce offspring. For example, all dogs are the same species. But a chimpanzee and an orangutan are different species.
survive	To have all of one's basic needs met. The basic needs for virtually every living thing are food, water, air, protection, and space.