

Rainforest food

In a rainforest, nearly everything is food for something else.

Plant-eating birds eat fruits and seeds, eagles may catch small seed-eating birds and, when they die, vultures may pick over their bones.

This natural pattern of eating is called a food chain.

Can you make up a food chain and draw the animals in the space below?

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The rainforest provides an ideal opportunity to think about food chains and to explain the different types of living things that go to make all food chains. This is a cross-curricular link with science.

1. Explain the ideas of herbivores, carnivores and decomposers (help children to understand that carrion are carnivores that eat dead animals). Decomposers are all microscopic bacteria and similar organisms that release the nourishment in dead materials into soluble forms that will mix with soil water and be available for plant roots to use as fertiliser (nourishment).
2. Explain that the bottom of the food chain is made by plants.

The next part of the food chain is herbivores.

The next part is carnivores (which are at the top of the food chain).

Explain that, as things die and are not eaten, so they are decomposed, thus enabling the dead matter to be recycled. (Explaining about a compost heap will help this.)

Explain that plants get their food in soluble form mainly from decomposed liquid fertiliser released by microbial digestion – they do not get it from the rocky bits of the soil.

Explain that there has to be a balance between plants, herbivores and carnivores. There have to be more plants than herbivores. There have to be more herbivores than carnivores because, at each stage, plant or animal tissue is not converted straight into tissue of the eater, but mostly used as heat (feel your own body to prove this).

Make sure that the students get the right kinds of animals. A ground-dwelling animal is not going to catch a canopy one, for example. Also, one native to Africa is not going to catch one native to South America!

Rainforest life has many animals to choose from.