



# Food Webs

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Science  
Grades 6–8



## Introduction

This is an introductory lesson about food webs and relationships among organisms in an ecosystem. It is understood that from past units of study students are familiar with the terms “ecosystem” and “organism”.

## Learning Objectives

- The learner will differentiate among the three different types of relationships – mutualism, parasitic, and commensalism.
- The learner will identify the relationships within a food web.
- The learner will relate the effects of the relationships to the food web.

## Materials Needed

- Sets of cards with pictures of living things from an ecosystem (enough for multiple groups)

## Procedure

**Warm up** – There is a fantastic YouTube video that is great for letting kids see how food webs work. It is called [“Crash Course Kids”](#). For today’s warm-up, allow students to watch this very short video about food webs. It highlights, in a very middle school-friendly and engaging way, the rainforest food web surrounding the spider monkey. It shows students how spider monkeys eat lots of fruits. Therefore, they spread seeds around the forest, from which new fruit plants grow. The sloths and insects also eat those fruits. In turn, the leopards consume the monkeys and sloths and frogs eat the insects. If the spider monkey, just one species, is removed from this web, all the other species are affected.

1. Vocabulary – Introduce the following words – **mutualism, parasitic, commensalism**
  - Mutualism – a relationship between two living things in which both benefit (Example – oxpecker and zebra)
  - Parasitic – a relationship in which one living thing lives in or on another living thing (Example – flea, worm, fungus)
  - Commensalism – a relationship in which one living thing is helped while the other one is not affected (Example – remora and shark)
  - Discuss the meaning and show the examples. Use a visual for each example.

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- Put students in groups. Give each group a set of cards with pictures of living things from an ecosystem.
  - For example: Set 1– mountain lion, hawk, shrew, mouse, rabbit, snake, squirrel, fungi, grass, insects, birds, deer
  - Choose other ecosystems for each group of students you have a make a set of cards with pictures of living things from that ecosystem.
- Allow each group to work on creating a food web out of their picture cards. The teacher will monitor and provide guidance as needed.
- After students have had time to work on food webs, display one set of picture cards with projector. Recreate food web with the class, discussing the relationships (mutualism, parasitic, commensalism) as you go through.

## Evaluation

For a formative assessment, have students complete the following question.

Think of two or more living things that coexist in an ecosystem. Identify the organisms and describe the type relationship they have and which type of relationship it is (mutualism, parasitic, commensalism). Draw a diagram and label.