

## Care for Plants and Animals

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By helping to care for animals and plants, students learn to be sensitive to the needs of others and to engage in acts of service. This activity also provides an opportunity for hand-on, place-based learning about organisms and ecosystems.

**GRADES:** All

**INTENDED OUTCOMES:** heart, hands

**SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:**

- For plants - soil, pots, seeds or starters, shovels
- For animals - a cage or habitat, bedding, food
- For habitat - gloves, closed-toed shoes, the help of a local restoration ecologist

**Suggested steps and/or focus for each grade level\*:**

**ECE-3RD GRADE**

- Take time to introduce the plant or animal you have selected to students. They could spend some time making observations about it, discussing what they know about it, and generating questions that will help the class take care of it. For example, What does it eat? How much water does it like? Does it like sun or shade?
- Create a plan for how you will take care of it. Is it part of the classroom chore chart or a special privilege that is earned?
- Work time into your schedule to check in on the plant or animal as a class to see how it's doing. Is it growing? Is it active? Discuss how you think you are doing as a community in taking care of it.
- For 2nd and 3rd grade especially, remind students that all living things have needs, including humans, and that we have to make choices about how the needs of other organisms are met.

**4TH AND 5TH GRADE**

- Continue to use the steps above, however, as students get older, widen their perspectives on the natural world by caring for animals and plants on the schoolyard or in a nearby habitat, instead of inside.
- Ideas include planting a patch of native plants or having chickens, rabbits, or small fish in a pond or tub. If you are interested in caring for or restoring a natural habitat, contact the agency that manages that land first so they can provide guidance.

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL**

- Restore native habitat in a local park, greenbelt, stream channel, or other area flagged by a local land management agency. Work with the agency to train students and make ecologically sound decisions about how to care for the habitat.

## **HIGH SCHOOL**

- Help these students feel like they are making difference by joining a long-term stewardship project that they visit regularly over the year. Work with local land management agencies to select or join a project and to understand the complexities of the social, economic, ecological, and political systems that influence how the area is managed. Click here for a list of partners that do stewardship.
- You could also give each student a small plant or animal (like a guppy) to be responsible for - a great lesson as they transition into more adult roles.

\*For more detail on the grade-level focus for natural and social concepts and sense of place, please refer to the Guidelines



## **TIPS AND TRICKS**

- For classroom plants - ask for plant that does well inside and stands up to being loved (and watered) by many little hands.
- Consider the cost and supplies necessary to properly care for the plant or animal you choose. For example, Beta fish don't typically require a tank with a filter, whereas other fish do.
- You may also be able to find plants or animals on online forms like craigslist. Try reaching out to your parent and local community (plant nurseries, etc.) for donated supplies.
- Part of caring for plants and animals may include experiencing their entire life cycle - from birth to death. If this happens, try to be open with students. Learning about death as a natural and inevitable part of the life cycle of all things, from a scientific perspective, is one of the safest ways to encounter what can be a difficult topic.



## **Relevant Standards**

**SC09-GR.P-S.2-GLE1, SC09-GR.1-S.2-GLE.2**