



Home Sweet Home

Children explore a habitat where plants and animals live together in a backyard, schoolyard, or neighborhood and then create a diorama to illustrate it.

Investigation and learning objectives:

In this activity, children will have the opportunity to:

- Visit a habitat and do a survey of the plants and animals that live there.
- Describe what the habitat is like and what makes it a good place for the plants and animals.
- Build a shoebox diorama that shows what the habitat is like and which animals and plants live there.

Timeframe:

Part 1 – 30-60 minutes; Part 2 – 50 minutes or two 30-minute sessions; Extension Activity – Two 50-60 minute sessions.

Overview:

Almost every place on Earth is home to various plants and animals, which live together, interact, and rely on each other. Different plants and animals are adapted to different climates and environmental conditions. Each living organism has different ways of surviving and getting air, food, water, and shelter. Their natural homes where they find the things they need are called habitats. A group of different plants and animals that live together in a habitat is called a community.

In this activity, kids observe and recognize what a habitat is and why a particular habitat is home sweet home to the plants and animals that live there. Kids do a survey of plants and animals in their backyard, schoolyard, or neighborhood and describe what the habitat is like and what lives there. They then make shoebox dioramas to show what they have learned.

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What you'll need:

- A backyard, schoolyard, or neighborhood place where kids can observe plants and animals.
- A shoebox (bottom part) for kids to make a diorama.
- Crayons or markers, paper for drawing and cutting out pictures of plants and animals, glue, tape, and scissors.
- [Optional]: Small bags to collect of materials found on the ground to add to the dioramas.

Introduce the idea:

If possible, introduce this investigation by watching the “Moving On Up” segment from episode 102 of IT’S A BIG BIG WORLD. Fed up with living with her messy brother, Smooch is determined to find another home in the World Tree suitable for a marmoset. Snook helps her explore all of the different habitats in the tree, but she can’t find another one that is a good fit for her. After receiving a message from her brother, Smooch realizes that sometimes there’s no place like home. After briefly discussing the episode, ask kids: What’s special about your home?

Part 1: Observing animals and plants in their habitat.

Tell kids that they are going to visit a neighborhood habitat so they can find out about the plants and animals that live there. Explain that a habitat is an area in which plants and animals live and that each habitat is specially suited for the plants and animals that live there. Take a walk to the habitat that they are going to observe and ask kids to predict what kinds of animals they might see. Kids’ ideas may include: ants, squirrels, pigeons or other birds, worms, or fish. Their ideas will vary based on the type of habitat you visit (a pond, for instance, will be a habitat to different animals than a forest). Let them know that they will be making a model (diorama) of the habitat after they explore it, so they should pay close attention to what they see.

Once they reach the habitat, tell kids to observe and record (make a survey of) the plants and animals that live there. Adults can help make a list and kids can draw pictures. You may ask kids questions like:

- What animals do you see and what do they look like? Describe where they are and what they are doing.
- What plants (trees, shrubs, flowers) do you see and what do they look like? Do you see any animals on or near the plants? What do you think is happening?
- What is the area or ground like? Do you see sand or dirt, lots of stones or rocks, patches of grass or lots of grass, flat or hilly, wet or dry land, stream or pond?
- What else is on the ground? Do you see litter or the branches and leaves of trees?

Ask kids why they think this habitat is a good place for the animals and plants that live there. What places do they see that the animals can live in? What food can they eat? Where do they find water?

[Optional]: Tell kids they can pick up a couple of things they find in the habitat such as pebbles, sand, leaves, or small sticks to place in their dioramas. They should be careful to take only a small amount and not to disturb the habitat. Give kids small paper bags to put them in.





After they explore the habitat, discuss their findings and review their discoveries. Ask kids to describe what it would be like to live there.

Part 2: Building dioramas.

Show kids how they can make a model or diorama of the habitat they visited by using a shoebox turned on its side. Explain that they can make drawings of the plants and animals they saw and place them in the diorama to show that they live together in a community. They may also add any materials they may have brought from the habitat they visited.

To help kids get started, ask them what they want to represent in their dioramas. What plants will they include? What are the animals doing? Will they have a sky with clouds? How will they show what the ground was like?

Help children construct their shoebox dioramas. They can draw pictures on the inside and outside of the box. They could begin by coloring the sky and/or ground cover. They can then draw and cut out animals, plants, and anything else in the area such as rocks and objects on the ground. When cutting out, leave a tab on the side, top, or bottom so it can be used to glue the cutout to the side, top, or bottom of the shoebox. Kids can also add any real materials they collected.

Children may create names for their habitats. Ideas could include:

- Squirrel Park
- Wet and Wild Pond
- Having a Ball at the Playground
- Mountain View
- Desert Life

When the dioramas are completed, kids can describe and tell a story about their creations. What do they think life is like for the animals in their diorama habitat?

Part 3: Visit another habitat (an extension for older children).

Take older kids on a second field trip to a different type of habitat so they become more aware of diversity in nature. Create a discussion so kids can share what they observed and compare the plants, animals, and settings in the two different habitats. Ask which habitat might be better for certain animals or how each habitat is exactly right for the animals and plants that live there.

Have kids decide which habitat they want to depict in their dioramas or suggest they create a diorama that shows both habitats so they can make comparisons. Expect their dioramas to have more details in terms of what the habitat looks like and the relationships among the plants and animals.

