

UC Santa Barbara

Educational Materials

Title

Dichotomous Key Lesson

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Storke Wetland: Dichotomous Key

Next Generation Science Standards

2-LS4-1. Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.

[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on the diversity of living things in each of a variety of different habitats.] [Assessment Boundary: Assessment does not include specific animal and plant names in specific habitats.]

Lesson Plan: Classification Game

Objective: Using a dichotomous key, children will learn how to classify organisms based on distinguishing characteristics.

Materials: Organism picture card set, organism informational card set, dichotomous key, brown paper bags, dice.

Preparation: Place one organism card in each bag. Look around to see if you can locate any live examples of the organisms on the cards and point them out to the children later.

Introduction

The concept of a dichotomous key is quite complex, so introduce the idea and relate to something the children can understand.

di·chot·o·mous - divided or dividing into two parts or classifications.

Dichotomous key - is used to identify plants and animals that you do not already know.

The root of di is two or split.

Most of the children will have no idea what dichotomous means.

- Ask them to say it with you and repeat it a few times fast, then say something goofy like dichotomous hippopotamus.
- Ask them what the prefix (you might need to explain what prefix means first) of dichotomous is, and eventually you'll get to di. Explain that di actually means two or split.
- Explain that dichotomous means broken into two different parts. See if they can tell you some words that have di as a prefix (Dicotyledon, dioxide, dice, dimorphic, dichromate)
- Hand them the dichotomous key and ask them what they think the dichotomous key is used for (hint it's on the paper), and they would say classification.

This will probably conclude the introduction. Have the children pair up and use the dichotomous keys to work out what organism is in each bag. Depending on how much time you have, do the activity a few times. Once the children have worked through the organism cards hand them the organism informational cards and ask them to read about their organism, and share one fact that they thought was the coolest with the group.

