YOU ARE MADE FROM SUNSHINE
Photosynthesis - How Plants Feed The World

OVERVIEW: Your students may know that plants need sunlight, but do they know why? Do your students know what it means that plants make their own food? (After all, plants are not going into the kitchen to make a meal.) This lesson will give your students a clear understanding of the process of photosynthesis: what it means, how it’s done, and why it feeds the world.

GRADES: 2-5

MATERIALS:
Photosynthesis worksheet for each student
Photosynthesis fill-in-the blank worksheet for each student
A Walk Through Photosynthesis worksheet (There is a beginner script outline for grades 2-3 and an advanced script outline for grades 4-5.)
Photosynthesis character cards
Optional: large painting of a plant on a tarp or cardboard to lay on the floor for scenery

PROCEDURE:
Begin a discussion by asking students: Do plants need sunlight? Most if not all students will say yes. Then ask, “Do you know why plants need sunlight?” Some students may answer that plants make their own food. Then ask, "Do you know how plants make their own food? After all, they don’t have a kitchen. How do they do this?"

Explain that plants are the only living things on Earth that can make their own food. All animals and plants ultimately depend on plants for their food. Plants need just three things to make food: carbon dioxide, water, and sunlight.

Demonstrate what it means that plants make their food by asking a child to volunteer to stand up at the front of the room. Ask this child we'll call Kelsey what her favorite food is. Perhaps she answers “pizza.”

Say “If Kelsey was a plant, this is how she would make her favorite food. She would breath in air, which contains the carbon dioxide plants need. (Kelsey takes a big breath.) She takes in water, which roots do for plants. (Kelsey takes a sip of water.) Then Kelsey would sit out in the sun. (Kelsey pantomimes sunbathing.) Then say, “A pizza appears right in Kelsey's stomach. She doesn't have to shop for it, or make it, or eat it. Plants make their
own favorite food right inside them. Of course, plants' favorite food is not pizza, it is glucose, which is a type of sugar. The glucose is distributed all over the plant."

You know that not every part of a plant tastes sweet like sugar. That's because when a plant stores food in its roots or stem or leaves, it changes the glucose into starch, which is not sweet.

Plants contain a special chemical that enables them to use sunlight to make food. This chemical is called chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is green! That is why most plant parts are green.

When people eat food, later they release waste, which is really not fun to talk about. When plants make food, they also release waste, but this waste is wonderful for people because it is oxygen that we breathe!

All animals and people depend on plants for their food. Even if an animal is a carnivore – a meat eater - this animal most likely eats an animal that is an herbivore – a plant eater. So basically, all people and animals are made from sunshine.

Next, tell students they are going to create a play to demonstrate photosynthesis. Give each student A Walk Through Photosynthesis worksheet and review the steps and characters.

Divide students into groups of nine for the beginner script and groups of 10 for the advanced script. If there are not enough students in your class for two students to play each role, one student can play the roles of the sun, the roots, the stem, the leaves, and the chlorophyll.

Pass out the photosynthesis character cards or have students pull them blindly from a box. Pass out safety pins for students to display their cards on their shirts.

Ask the students to use the photosynthesis script outline to create dialog for their characters. For example, what would the carbon dioxide say to explain what it is doing when it moves through the stomata? Each student must have at least one line of dialog. After all students have worked on their dialog, bring the class together to act out photosynthesis.

Encourage students to be creative and dramatic with their dialog. For example, the chlorophyll could be a mad scientist who says,"Bwa ha ha! I am going to capture sunshine and make food!" Or the oxygen could say, "Boy, it's too crowded in here. I'm going to escape into the fresh air!"
EVALUATION:
Students write dialog for the photosynthesis play.

Ask students to write a paragraph about photosynthesis from the point of view of their character in the play.

EXTENSIONS:
Take the class photosynthesis play on the road and perform it for other classes in the school.

New Jersey Learning Standards


A Walk Through Photosynthesis
Beginner Script Outline
Grades 2-3

The Characters
Sun  Chlorophyll  Stem
Carbon Dioxide  Roots  Glucose
Leaves  Water  Oxygen

The Plot

The sun shines down on the leaves.

Carbon dioxide from the air moves into the leaves.

The roots collect water and moves it up to the stem.

The stem moves the water up to the leaves.

The leaves now hold the carbon dioxide, water molecules, and the chlorophyll.

The chlorophyll uses the energy of the sun’s light, the carbon dioxide, and the water molecules to make glucose.

The leaves release oxygen into the air.

The glucose moves to every part of the plant.
The Characters

Sun  Oxygen  Roots
Carbon Dioxide  Leaves  Water Molecules
Stomata  Chlorophyll  STEM
Glucose

The Plot

The sun shines down on the plant.

The stomata are small pores or holes located on the undersides of leaves. The stomata open to let in carbon dioxide from the air.

When the stomata open, some water molecules inside the plant sneak into the air. This is caused transpiration. About 10% of the water vapor in the Earth's atmosphere is due to transpiration. Those water molecules will become part of the Earth's water cycle.

Carbon dioxide moves through the stomata into the leaves.

The roots collect water molecules and move them up to the stem.

The stem moves water molecules up to the leaves.

The leaves now hold the carbon dioxide, water molecules, and the chlorophyll.

The chlorophyll uses the energy from the sun's light, the carbon dioxide, and the water molecules to make glucose.

The stomata release oxygen into the air.

The glucose moves to every part of the plant.
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Water, Stem, Glucose, Oxygen
Color the Photosynthesis Process

Illustration courtesy of sciencewithme.com