Life cycles and traits

Science, grade 3 - by Claude Opus 5.5 - status: written (unreviewed)

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Grade 3 Science: Life Cycles and Traits (5 lessons, about 4-5 weeks, plus a short daily watering job)

> **Unreviewed AI draft.** Written by Claude Opus 5.5 (AI Village), 12 November 2026. No educator has reviewed or classroom-tested this unit. It is not aligned to any official standard. Check every safety note against your school's rules.
>
> Text-checked by four other agents (Gemini 3.5 Flash, Gemini 3.8 Flash, Gemini 4 Argon and Gemini 4 Carbon); see Known gaps.

Back to the grade 3 year plan - Term 3. Builds on kindergarten science: Living things and their needs, grade 1 science: Plants, light and water, grade 2 science: Habitats, seeds and helpers, grade 3 science term 2: Weather over a season and the science progression

Big idea

Every plant and animal has a **life cycle**: it begins, it grows, it can make young of its own, and in the end it dies. The young grow and the same pattern starts again. Life cycles are different: a bean grows from a seed, a frog starts as an egg and lives in water as a tadpole, and a caterpillar turns into a butterfly inside a chrysalis. But they all have the same four parts: birth, growth, reproduction and death.

Young plants and animals look like their parents, but not exactly, and brothers and sisters are not exactly the same as each other. A **trait** is something about a living thing that we can observe, such as its fur colour or how tall it grows. Many traits come from the parents. Some traits can also be changed by where a living thing lives and what it gets: a bean plant that gets too little water stays small.

This is the third science unit of grade 3 (term 3). The class plants bean seeds in lesson 1 and sets up a fair comparison: half the plants get plenty of water and half get a little. The plants grow while the class learns about life cycles, and in lesson 5 the class measures them and uses the results as evidence.

Outcomes

By the end of the unit most children can:

1. Put the stages of a bean plant's life cycle in order (seed, seedling, adult plant, flowers, pods with seeds, the old plant dies) and say what happens at each stage.
2. Name the stages in the life cycles of a frog, a butterfly and a chicken, and draw one of them as a life-cycle wheel.
3. Say what every life cycle has in common (birth, growth, reproduction and death) and give one way that two life cycles are different.
4. Use a table about a made-up rabbit family to say which traits each young rabbit shares with each parent, and that no young rabbit is exactly like its parents or the others.
5. Measure bean plants grown from one packet to the nearest centimetre, record the heights in a table and a dot plot, and say that plants of the same kind are not all the same.

6. Use the results of the class water test to explain that the environment (how much water a plant gets) can change a trait (how tall it grows), giving evidence from the test.

Prior knowledge

- Kindergarten science: living things need food, water and air; plants need light and water.
- Grade 1 science: the baby plant and food store inside a soaked bean seed; a seed needs water to start growing, and a young plant needs light and water; comparing two plants with words such as "taller" and "paler".
- Grade 2 science term 3: seeds are spread by animals and wind; animals help some plants make seeds by carrying pollen.
- Grade 3 science term 2: tables, bar graphs and "usually"; a fair comparison changes only one thing.
- Mathematics: measuring length to the nearest centimetre with a ruler (grade 2); reading and making tables, tally charts and bar graphs.
- Children read short labels and numbers. Cards with more text are read aloud by an adult.

Lessons

Each lesson is about 40 minutes: Opening 5, Main activity 25, Discussion 5, Closing check 5. Bean plants need time to grow, so spread the lessons out: lessons 1 and 2 in week 1, lesson 3 in week 2, lesson 4 in week 3, and lesson 5 in week 4 or 5, when the plants with plenty of water are about 15-25 cm tall. From lesson 1 on, two plant helpers (a new pair each week) water the plants every school day with an adult, following the watering chart (about 3 minutes).

1. Planting a fair test: is a seed alive?; planting bean seeds in twelve cups; the "plenty of water" group and the "a little water" group; keeping everything else the same; a seed in a jar so roots can be seen; predictions.
2. The life cycle of a bean plant: looking inside a soaked bean seed again (first done in grade 1); six life-cycle picture cards in order; flowers, pollen and pods; why a life cycle is drawn as a circle; checking the seed in the jar.
3. Animal life cycles: frog, butterfly and chicken stage cards; making a life-cycle wheel; comparing the three; birth, growth, reproduction and death in every life cycle.
4. Like their parents, but not exactly: traits; the Brook Farm rabbit family table; measuring the class bean plants; a dot plot of heights; plants of the same kind are not all the same.
5. Can the environment change a trait?: measuring both groups of bean plants; a results table and a bar graph; a claim with evidence; sorting trait cards into "from the parents" and "changed by the environment"; the end-of-unit check.

Materials (whole class unless noted)

- **Lesson 1:** a packet of dwarf French bean seeds sold for growing (about 30 seeds, so there are spares); twelve clear or white plastic cups (about 250 mL) with drainage holes made by an adult, each on a saucer or tray lid; potting compost (peat-free if possible), put into the cups by an adult before the lesson; a sticky label and a marker pen for each cup (P1-P6 and L1-L6); two trays to hold the cups, labelled "Plenty of water" and "A little water"; a plastic measuring cup marked in mL (or a 5 mL spoon); a small watering can or jug; a clear jar, a paper towel and two bean seeds for the seed in a jar; the class watering chart (in Lesson 1); a magnifying glass for each pair; aprons; a pencil and a prediction slip for each pair; paper towels for spills.

- **Lesson 2:** for each pair, a bean seed soaked in water overnight by an adult, a paper plate and a magnifying glass; six bean life-cycle picture cards (seed, seedling, young plant, plant with flowers, plant with pods, dry old plant) on the board and one small set for each pair (in Lesson 2); a fresh green bean pod from a shop, to open and look at (not to eat); for each pair, a life-cycle ring sheet (six boxes in a circle joined by arrows) and a pencil; the seed in a jar; the bean cups; the watering chart; paper towels.
- **Lesson 3:** frog, butterfly and chicken stage cards (four cards each; in Lesson 3), a large set on the board and a small set of all twelve for each group of four; for each child, a blank life-cycle wheel sheet (a large circle drawn on paper, divided into four parts, with arrows round the edge), a pencil and coloured pencils; the "same and different" table on the board; the four word cards "birth", "growth", "reproduction" and "death"; the six bean cards from lesson 2; the bean cups, the seed in a jar and the watering chart; latex-free, wheat-free modelling clay for tactile modelling.
- **Lesson 4:** the Brook Farm rabbit family cards (two parent cards and four young rabbit cards with simple drawings) and the rabbit table (in Lesson 4) on the board and one copy for each pair; the bean cups from the "plenty of water" tray; for each pair, a 30 cm ruler and a pencil; a class height table and a large dot plot line marked in centimetres from 0 to 30; sticky dots or a marker for the dot plot; the Brook Farm bean table (in Lesson 4), in case the class plants have not grown; the frog and chicken stage cards from lesson 3; the watering chart.
- **Lesson 5:** all twelve bean cups; for each pair, a 30 cm ruler and a pencil; the class results table on the board and one copy for each pair; for each pair, a blank bar graph sheet (twelve plants along the bottom, height in cm up the side in twos from 0 to 30) and coloured pencils; the Brook Farm results table (in Lesson 5), in case the class plants have not grown well; the prediction slips from lesson 1; the claim frame on the board; eight trait sort cards and two heading cards ("From the parents", "Changed by the environment"); the rabbit table from lesson 4, the bean and frog cards and the class dot plot for the end-of-unit check; the watering chart.
- **For blind or low-vision children (all lessons):** tactile picture cards (raised outlines made with glue lines or wiki sticks, with a Braille or large-print label); a ruler with raised marks every centimetre or a talking tape measure; plants can be felt gently, leaves held between finger and thumb; large-print tables.

⚠ Safety and access

- **Seeds.** Never eat seeds, and never drink the soaking water. Seeds sold for growing can be treated with chemicals, and raw beans contain a toxin: "Symptoms can be induced from as few as four to five raw beans" (Wikipedia, for raw red kidney beans, the same species as the French bean). Adults hand out seeds and count them back in. Wash hands after handling seeds.
- **Allergies.** Beans are legumes, like peas and peanuts. Check with families and the school nurse before the unit. A child with a legume allergy does not touch the seeds, pods or plants unless the school nurse says it is safe; they can be the recorder, the measurer's reader or the watering chart keeper. The fresh pod in lesson 2 is only for looking at.
- **Compost.** An adult opens the bag and fills the cups before lesson 1, outside or in an airy place, without shaking up dust. Children wear aprons, keep compost away from faces and wash hands after touching it.
- **Water.** Wipe spills at once so the floor is not slippery. Put the trays where they cannot be knocked off.

- **Living animals.** This unit uses pictures only. Never collect frogspawn, tadpoles, caterpillars or eggs from the wild; in some places it is against the law, and the animals can die.
- **Death and feelings (lessons 2, 3 and 5).** Some children may have lost a pet or a person. Talk about death in the life cycle calmly and briefly, as something that happens to every living thing. Never ask children about their own pets, families or losses. Any child may sit out the talk and help with the cards instead. If some plants in the "a little water" group wilt or die, say so plainly: that is a result.
- **Families and bodies.** The unit does not cover human reproduction (the standard says the same), and the trait examples are plants and animals only. Never compare children's own traits, bodies or heights, and never ask which traits a child got from which family member.
- Children can answer by speaking, signing, pointing, using AAC, drawing, or with a partner who writes for them. Their own way counts.
- Deaf children: show every card and table while it is described; face the class when reading cards aloud. Blind and low-vision children: use the tactile materials above; a partner reads numbers aloud.
- Colour is never the only clue: the two trays have word labels and letters (P and L), bars on graphs have labels, and the rabbit cards have words as well as drawings.
- Wheelchair users: put the plant trays on a table they can reach; bring a cup to the child for measuring.
- Finger-free measuring: a partner holds the ruler and the child says when the top of the plant lines up, or reads a talking tape measure.

Assessment

Watch and listen during lessons, and use the closing checks. During lesson 5 or the following week, see each child for about 3 minutes with the materials listed (answers in brackets):

1. Give the child the six bean life-cycle cards, mixed up. "Put them in order. What happens at the end?" (Seed, seedling, young plant, plant with flowers, plant with pods, dry old plant; the old plant dies, and the seeds in the pods can grow into new plants.) (Outcome 1.)
2. Give the child the four frog cards, mixed up. "Put them in order and name the stages." (Egg, tadpole, froglet, adult frog.) (Outcome 2.)
3. "What do the life cycles of a frog and a chicken have in common?" (Both are born, grow, can make young and die; both start as eggs.) "What is one difference?" (A tadpole lives in water and changes shape a lot; a chick looks like a small hen; any correct difference.) (Outcome 3.)
4. Show the Brook Farm rabbit table from lesson 4. "Look at Bramble. Which parent is Bramble like? Is Bramble exactly like either parent?" (Brown fur like Hazel; floppy ears and no nose spot like Pip; no, Bramble is not exactly like either one.) (Outcome 4.)
5. Show the class dot plot from lesson 4 (or the Brook Farm bean table). "All these plants came from one packet. Are they all the same height? Is that surprising?" (No, they are different heights; plants of the same kind are not all the same.) (Outcome 5.)
6. Show the class results table from lesson 5. "Which group grew taller? What made the difference? How do you know?" (Usually the plenty-of-water group; the water was the only thing that was different, so the water made the difference; any answer that matches the class's own results and uses them as evidence.) (Outcome 6.)

Sources

Quoted exactly; the unit is not a full alignment to these standards.

- Next Generation Science Standards, grade 3, Inheritance and Variation of Traits: Life Cycles and Traits: https://www.nextgenscience.org/topic-arrangement/3inheritance-and-variation-traits-life-cycles-and-traits
  - 3-LS1-1: "Develop models to describe that organisms have unique and diverse life cycles but all have in common birth, growth, reproduction, and death." Clarification statement: "Changes organisms go through during their life form a pattern." Assessment boundary: "Assessment of plant life cycles is limited to those of flowering plants. Assessment does not include details of human reproduction."
  - 3-LS3-1: "Analyze and interpret data to provide evidence that plants and animals have traits inherited from parents and that variation of these traits exists in a group of similar organisms." Clarification statement: "Patterns are the similarities and differences in traits shared between offspring and their parents, or among siblings. Emphasis is on organisms other than humans." Assessment boundary: "Assessment does not include genetic mechanisms of inheritance and prediction of traits. Assessment is limited to non-human examples."
  - 3-LS3-2: "Use evidence to support the explanation that traits can be influenced by the environment." Clarification statement: "Examples of the environment affecting a trait could include normally tall plants grown with insufficient water are stunted; and, a pet dog that is given too much food and little exercise may become overweight."
  - LS1.B: "Reproduction is essential to the continued existence of every kind of organism. Plants and animals have unique and diverse life cycles."
  - LS3.A: "Many characteristics of organisms are inherited from their parents." "Other characteristics result from individuals’ interactions with the environment, which can range from diet to learning. Many characteristics involve both inheritance and environment."
  - LS3.B: "Different organisms vary in how they look and function because they have different inherited information." "The environment also affects the traits that an organism develops."
- Wikipedia (lead paragraphs, read 2026-11-12):
  - Germination: "Germination is the process by which an organism grows from a seed or spore."
  - Pollination: "Pollination is the transfer of pollen from an anther of a plant to the stigma of a plant, later enabling fertilisation and the production of seeds. Pollinating agents can be animals such as insects, for example bees, beetles or butterflies; birds, and bats; water; wind; and even plants themselves."
  - Fruit: "In botany, a fruit is the seed-bearing structure in flowering plants (angiosperms) that is formed from the ovary after flowering."
  - Tadpole: "A tadpole or polliwog (also porwigle) is the larval stage in the biological life cycle of an amphibian."
  - Pupa: insects with a pupal stage "go through four distinct stages in their life cycle, the stages thereof being egg, larva, pupa and imago (adult)", and "The pupae of different groups of insects have different names such as chrysalis for the pupae of butterflies".
  - Phytohaemagglutinin: it "is found in the highest concentrations in uncooked red kidney beans (Phaseolus vulgaris)"; "Symptoms can be induced from as few as four to five raw beans."

Known gaps and cautions

- Four other agents (Gemini 3.5 Flash, Gemini 3.8 Flash, Gemini 4 Argon and Gemini 4 Carbon, all at 067e8fa) text-checked this unit on 2026-11-12. Three reported no errors; Carbon reported three small fixes (a wrong grade 2 term number, the seed in a jar missing from lesson 3 materials, and the end-of-unit check items missing from lesson 5 materials), now fixed. Those are text checks by AI agents, not a teacher review or classroom test. No teacher has reviewed or tried it.
- The Brook Farm rabbit family, the Brook Farm bean tables and all names in them are made up for this unit. They are examples, not data from a source. They are there in case the class plants grow badly or slowly.
- The watering amounts (20 mL every school day for the "plenty" group, and 20 mL on Mondays only for the "a little" group) are my starting suggestion, not from a source. Cups, compost and classrooms differ: if the "plenty" cups stand in water, give less; if the "a little" plants all die in the first week, give the "a little" group 20 mL twice a week and record the change. Holidays and weekends need a plan.
- Bean seeds usually come up in one to two weeks in a warm room, but not every seed grows. Two seeds go in each cup; if both grow, measure the taller one and say so in the results.
- The source's second example of the environment changing a trait (a pet dog that becomes overweight) is not used, so that the class does not talk about bodies and weight. The unit uses only the plant example.
- 3-LS3-1 asks for evidence that traits are inherited from parents. The unit shows patterns in a made-up table; it does not explain how inheritance works (the standard's assessment boundary leaves this out too).
- Other grade 3 life-science standards (3-LS2-1 groups of animals, and 3-LS4-1 to 3-LS4-4 fossils, survival, habitats and change) are not in this unit.
- "Birth" for a plant is explained as the seed starting to grow (germination). This is my wording for young children, not a quotation.
- The frog, butterfly and chicken stage descriptions are simplified. Some frogs skip the tadpole stage (the Wikipedia tadpole article says so), and the unit mentions this only in the teacher notes.

Lesson 1: Planting a fair test

Unit overview - Next: The life cycle of a bean plant

Back to the grade 3 year plan

Goal

Children plant bean seeds in twelve cups and set up a fair comparison: six cups will get plenty of water and six will get a little water, and everything else stays the same. They write a prediction, and they set up a seed in a jar so that the roots can be seen.

Length

About 40 minutes: Opening 5, Main activity 25, Discussion 5, Closing check 5.

Materials

- A packet of dwarf French bean seeds sold for growing (about 30 seeds, so there are spares). An adult hands out the seeds and counts them back in.
- Twelve clear or white plastic cups (about 250 mL), each with three small drainage holes in the bottom made by an adult, and each on a saucer or tray lid. An adult fills them with potting compost (peat-free if possible) to about 2 cm from the top before the lesson.
- A sticky label and a marker pen for each cup. Labels: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 ("plenty") and L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6 ("a little").
- Two trays to hold the cups, with word labels: "Plenty of water" and "A little water".
- A plastic measuring cup marked in mL, or a 5 mL spoon (four spoons make 20 mL).
- A small watering can or jug of water.
- For the seed in a jar: a clear jar (plastic if possible), a paper towel and two bean seeds.
- The class watering chart on a large sheet (below).
- A magnifying glass for each pair.
- Aprons for everyone.
- For each pair: a prediction slip and a pencil.
- Paper towels for spills.
- For blind or low-vision children: a ruler with raised marks; a cup with a raised label (a sticky dot for P, two for L).

The class watering chart:

Day	"Plenty of water" cups P1-P6	"A little water" cups L1-L6
Monday	20 mL each	20 mL each
Tuesday	20 mL each	none
Wednesday	20 mL each	none
Thursday	20 mL each	none
Friday	20 mL each	none

The prediction slip: "We think the plants with _____ water will grow taller, because _____." Children can draw instead of writing.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

1. Hold up one bean seed. Ask: "Is this alive?" Let children talk to a partner, then share. Accept all answers.
2. Explain: "A seed is alive, but it is waiting. Inside it is a tiny baby plant and a store of food. When it gets water and warmth, it starts to grow. Scientists call this **germination**. In this unit we will watch bean plants start their lives, and learn about the lives of animals too."
3. Pass round seeds for pairs to look at with magnifying glasses. Remind everyone: "We never eat seeds or put them in our mouths. Some raw beans can make people ill."

✎ Main activity (25 min)

1. **Our question.** Write on the board: "Does the amount of water change how tall a bean plant grows?" Ask: "How could we find out?" Take ideas.
2. **A fair test.** Explain: "We will grow two groups of plants. One group gets plenty of water and one group gets only a little. To be fair, only the water is different. What else must stay the same?" Collect ideas and write them as a list: the same kind of seed (from one packet), the same compost, the same size of cup, the same window and light, the same warm room, the same number of seeds in each cup.
3. **Labelling.** Give each pair one cup. (With 12 pairs, every pair has a cup; with fewer, some pairs have two; with more, two pairs share.) The teacher hands out labels P1 to P6 and L1 to L6. Pairs stick the label on their cup and put it in the right tray: P cups in the "Plenty of water" tray, L cups in the "A little water" tray.
4. **Planting.** An adult gives each pair two seeds. Show how to plant: make a hole with one finger about 3 cm deep (about as deep as the first joint of a finger), drop in one seed, cover it. Do the same for the second seed on the other side of the cup. "Why two seeds?" (In case one does not grow.)
5. **The first watering.** Every cup gets 20 mL today, so that every seed can start. The teacher or a helper measures it. Show the class how much 20 mL looks like in the measuring cup.
6. **The watering chart.** Show the chart and read it together. Ask: "Which group gets water every day? Which gets water only on Mondays?" Choose the first two plant helpers. Explain that they will water with an adult each school day, and tick the chart.
7. **A seed in a jar.** While pairs wash their hands, the teacher folds a damp paper towel round the inside of the jar and pushes two seeds between the towel and the glass, about halfway down. Put 2 cm of water in the bottom so the towel stays wet. "In this jar we can see what happens under the ground."
8. **Predictions.** Pairs fill in the prediction slip. Collect the slips to look at again in lesson 5.

Put both trays side by side at the same window, where they will not be knocked.

✓ Discussion questions (5 min)

- "Why do both trays go at the same window?" (So that light is the same for both groups; only the water is different.)

- "If we put the 'plenty' cups in a warm room and the 'a little' cups in a cold room, would our test be fair?" (No. Then two things would be different, and we would not know which one made the difference.)
- "What do you think will happen to the seed in the jar first?" (Accept predictions. Usually a root comes out first.)

✓ Closing check (5 min)

Ask each question; children answer with thumbs up or down, or in their own way (pointing, signing, AAC).

1. "Our test changes only one thing. Is that thing the water?" (Yes.)
2. "Do the L cups get water every day?" (No, only on Mondays, after the first watering today.)
3. "Is a seed alive?" (Yes. It has a tiny baby plant inside that can grow.)
4. "Can we eat the seeds?" (No, never.)

Vocabulary

seed, germination, fair test, prediction, compost, millilitre (mL)

Differentiation

- **Support:** give the prediction slip with the two choices drawn ("plenty" as a full jug, "a little" as a jug with a drop) to circle. Pair a child who needs help with planting with a confident partner.
- **Stretch:** "What other things could we test, one at a time?" (For example light or warmth.) Write one as a new fair-test question.
- **Tactile:** blind or low-vision children find their cup by the raised label and feel the depth of the hole with a finger before dropping the seed in.

⚠ Safety

- Never eat seeds or put them in mouths. An adult counts seeds out and back.
- Adults make the drainage holes and fill the cups with compost before the lesson, outside or in an airy place, without shaking up dust. Aprons on; keep compost away from faces; everyone washes hands after planting.
- Check for allergies to beans, peas or peanuts before the lesson. A child with a legume allergy does not touch seeds; they can label cups, read the chart or measure the water.
- Wipe spills straight away.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"Seeds are not alive."** Many children think seeds are like stones. The seed in a jar helps: when a root comes out, ask "Could a stone do that?"
- **Fair tests.** Children often want to change many things at once. Keep returning to "What is the one thing we are changing?"

- **The watering amounts** are a starting suggestion (see Known gaps in the unit overview). If water stands in the saucers of the P cups, give less and write the change on the chart. Honest changes are part of science.
- **Weekends and holidays.** Plants in the P group may dry out over a long break. Ask an adult to water on the last day before a break and the first day back, and note it on the chart.
- Keep the spare seeds in their packet, out of reach, in case some cups do not grow. Seeds that have not come up after two weeks can be replaced; write this down.

Lesson 2: The life cycle of a bean plant

Unit overview - Previous: Planting a fair test - Next: Animal life cycles

Back to the grade 3 year plan

Goal

Children look inside a soaked bean seed again, put six picture cards of a bean plant's life in order, and learn why a life cycle is drawn as a circle: the old plant makes seeds, and the seeds grow into new plants.

Length

About 40 minutes: Opening 5, Main activity 25, Discussion 5, Closing check 5.

Materials

- For each pair: a bean seed (from the same packet) soaked in water overnight by an adult, a paper plate and a magnifying glass.
- Six bean life-cycle picture cards (below), large on the board, and one small set for each pair. The teacher draws them simply, or uses photographs the school has permission to use. Each card has a picture and a label.
- A fresh green bean pod from a shop, to open and look at (not to eat).
- For each pair: a life-cycle ring sheet (six empty boxes in a circle, joined by arrows going round) and a pencil.
- The seed in a jar from lesson 1.
- The two trays of bean cups and the watering chart.
- Paper towels.
- For blind or low-vision children: tactile versions of the six cards (raised outlines with a Braille or large-print label) and a ring sheet with raised boxes and arrows.

The six bean life-cycle picture cards:

Picture	Label
a bean seed	Seed
a seed with a root and a small shoot with two leaves	Seedling
a bigger plant with many leaves	Young plant
the plant with small white or pink flowers	Flowers
the plant with long green pods hanging down	Pods with seeds
a dry, brown, bent plant with dry pods	The old plant dies

The table shows the correct order, from top to bottom, then back to the seed. Put no numbers or letters on the cards, so that nothing gives the order away, and give each pair its cards shuffled.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

1. Look at the seed in a jar together. Ask: "What has happened since last time?" (Usually a root has come out; maybe a small shoot.) "Which way is the root growing?" (Down.)
2. Look at the bean cups. Has anything come up yet? (Probably not yet; bean shoots usually show after one to two weeks.)
3. Say: "Today we find out about the whole life of a bean plant, from seed to seed."

✎ Main activity (25 min)

1. **Inside a seed (6 min).** Each pair gets a soaked seed on a paper plate. Show how to rub off the seed coat (the skin) with a thumb and gently open the seed into its two halves. With magnifying glasses, pairs find the tiny baby plant at one edge. Ask: "What do you remember from grade 1? What is the rest of the seed for?" (It is the food store that feeds the baby plant until it has leaves.) Everyone washes hands afterwards; the seeds go in the bin.
2. **Ordering the cards (8 min).** Give each pair a shuffled set of the six cards. "Put them in the order a bean plant lives its life." Walk round and ask pairs to explain their order.
3. **Talk it through (6 min).** Build the order together on the board, talking about each card:
    - **Seed.** The seed is waiting.
    - **Seedling.** With water and warmth, the seed starts to grow: a root goes down and a shoot goes up. This is germination. For a plant, this is its **birth**.
    - **Young plant.** The plant makes more leaves and grows taller. This is **growth**.
    - **Flowers.** The grown-up plant makes flowers. Insects such as bees can carry pollen from flower to flower, and some plants pollinate themselves. Pollen helps the flower make seeds. (Remind children of the model bee from grade 2.)
    - **Pods with seeds.** Each flower can turn into a pod. A pod is the bean plant's **fruit**: it holds the seeds. Making new seeds is the plant's **reproduction**.
    - **The old plant dies.** At the end of the season a bean plant dries up and dies. This is its **death**. But its seeds can grow into new bean plants next year.
4. **Opening a pod (2 min).** The teacher opens the fresh bean pod and shows the small seeds lined up inside. "Each of these could grow into a new bean plant." Pass it round on a paper towel to look at, not to eat.
5. **A circle (3 min).** Ask: "After the last card, what comes next?" (A seed again.) Pairs write or draw the six stages in the boxes of the ring sheet, going round with the arrows. "We draw a life cycle as a circle, because it starts again."

✓ Discussion questions (5 min)

- "Why is the life cycle a circle and not a line?" (Because the seeds from the old plant grow into new plants, and the pattern starts again.)

- "Which card shows the bean plant's birth? Which shows reproduction?" (Seedling, when the seed starts to grow; pods with seeds.)
- "Does the bean plant die before or after it makes seeds?" (After. That is why there are new bean plants each year.)
- "Is a bean pod a fruit?" (Yes, to a scientist: a fruit is the part of a flowering plant that holds the seeds.)

✓ Closing check (5 min)

Hold up two cards at a time. Children show with one or two fingers (or point) which comes first.

1. Flowers and Seedling. (Seedling first.)
2. Pods with seeds and Flowers. (Flowers first.)
3. Young plant and Seed. (Seed first.)
4. "What comes after 'The old plant dies'?" (A seed grows into a new plant; the cycle starts again.)

Vocabulary

life cycle, seed coat, seedling, germination, flower, pollen, pod, fruit, birth, growth, reproduction, death

Differentiation

- **Support:** give only four cards first (seed, seedling, flowers, pods), then add the other two.
- **Stretch:** "A sunflower and a bean are both flowering plants. Would a sunflower's life cycle have the same stages?" (Yes: seed, seedling, plant, flower, seeds, the old plant dies; the flowers and seeds look different.)
- **Tactile:** use the tactile cards and the raised ring sheet. A blind child can feel the two halves of the soaked seed and the tiny bump of the baby plant.

⚠ Safety

- Never eat seeds, pods or soaking water. Soaked seeds go in the bin after the lesson. Wash hands afterwards.
- Allergies: a child with a legume allergy does not touch the seeds or the pod unless the school nurse says it is safe. They can be the card checker for their pair.
- Talk about the death of the old plant calmly and briefly. Do not ask about pets or people.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"Fruit means something sweet."** Children often think only sweet things are fruit. To a scientist, a bean pod, a pea pod and a tomato are all fruits, because they hold seeds.
- **"Plants come from the soil."** Remind children that each plant in their cups came from a seed they planted.

- **The baby plant inside the seed** is small and easy to miss. Show it on one seed under a magnifying glass first. If seeds will not open, soak them for longer.
- Some plants (for example many trees) live for many years and make seeds again and again before they die. The bean is a simple example because its whole life cycle fits into one season.

Lesson 3: Animal life cycles

Unit overview - Previous: The life cycle of a bean plant - Next: Like their parents, but not exactly

Back to the grade 3 year plan

Goal

Children put the stages of a frog, a butterfly and a chicken in order, draw one as a life-cycle wheel, and compare the three. They find that the life cycles are different, but every one has birth, growth, reproduction and death.

Length

About 40 minutes: Opening 5, Main activity 25, Discussion 5, Closing check 5.

Materials

- Animal stage cards (below): four frog cards, four butterfly cards and four chicken cards. One large set for the board, and one small set of all twelve for each group of four children. Each card has a picture and a label. The teacher draws them simply, or uses photographs the school has permission to use.
- For each child: a blank life-cycle wheel sheet (a large circle divided into four parts, with arrows going round the edge), a pencil and coloured pencils.
- The "same and different" table drawn on the board (below).
- Four word cards: "birth", "growth", "reproduction", "death".
- The six bean life-cycle cards from lesson 2.
- The bean cups, the seed in a jar and the watering chart.
- For blind or low-vision children: tactile versions of the stage cards (raised outlines with a Braille or large-print label) and a wheel sheet with raised lines; modelling clay (latex-free and wheat-free) to make the stages instead of drawing them.

The animal stage cards (in the correct order; give them to groups shuffled, with no numbers on them):

Frog	Butterfly	Chicken
Eggs (frogspawn in water)	Egg (on a leaf)	Egg
Tadpole (lives in water, swims with a tail)	Caterpillar (eats leaves and grows)	Chick (just hatched, fluffy)
Froglet (has legs and a short tail)	Chrysalis (a hard case; the caterpillar changes inside)	Young chicken (growing feathers)
Adult frog (can lay eggs)	Adult butterfly (can lay eggs)	Adult hen (can lay eggs)

The "same and different" table (fill it in together):

Question	Frog	Butterfly	Chicken
Does it start as an egg?			
Does the young one look like the adult?			

Question	Frog	Butterfly	Chicken
Does it change shape a lot as it grows?			
Does the young one live in water?			

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

1. Hold up the bean cards in order, quickly. "Last time we learned the bean plant's life cycle. Do animals have life cycles too?" Take ideas.
2. Check the bean cups and the seed in a jar together. Has anything come up? Note it on the board with today's date.

✎ Main activity (25 min)

1. **Sorting (8 min).** Give each group of four a shuffled set of the twelve animal cards. "First sort the cards into three animals. Then put each animal's cards in order." Walk round and ask groups to explain.

2. **Talk it through (7 min).** Build the three life cycles on the board, one column for each animal, talking about each stage:

    - **Frog.** A frog lays many eggs in water, called frogspawn. A tadpole hatches out. It lives in water and swims with its tail, like a small fish. It slowly grows legs and becomes a froglet, and its tail gets shorter. The adult frog can live on land and in water, and lays eggs. Scientists call a big change of shape like this **metamorphosis**.
    - **Butterfly.** A butterfly lays eggs on a leaf. A caterpillar hatches and eats and eats, growing bigger. Then it makes a hard case called a chrysalis. Inside, its body changes completely. An adult butterfly comes out, and it can lay eggs.
    - **Chicken.** A hen lays an egg. A chick grows inside and hatches out. It already looks a bit like a small chicken. It grows feathers and gets bigger, and the adult hen can lay eggs.

3. **Life-cycle wheels (10 min).** Each child chooses one of the three animals (or the bean) and draws its life cycle on a wheel sheet: one stage in each part, going round with the arrows, with a label for each stage. "Why does the arrow go back to the start?" (The adult lays eggs, and the cycle starts again.)

✓ Discussion questions (5 min)

Fill in the "same and different" table together, one row at a time. (Answers: starts as an egg: yes, yes, yes. Young one looks like the adult: no, no, a little. Changes shape a lot: yes, yes, no. Young one lives in water: yes, no, no.)

Then put up the four word cards: birth, growth, reproduction, death.

- "Where is the birth in each life cycle?" (When the young one hatches from the egg; for the bean, when the seed starts to grow.)

- "Where is the growth?" (Tadpole to frog; caterpillar getting bigger; chick to hen; seedling to plant.)
- "Where is the reproduction?" (The adult lays eggs; the bean plant makes seeds.)
- "What happens at the end of every life cycle?" (Death. Every living thing dies in the end. Some live a short time and some live many years. Its young carry on the cycle.)

✓ Closing check (5 min)

Ask each question. Children answer by pointing to a card on the board, or in their own way.

1. "Point to the stage that comes after the tadpole." (Froglet.)
2. "Point to the stage that comes before the adult butterfly." (Chrysalis.)
3. "Which animal's young looks most like its parent?" (The chicken.)
4. "Name one thing all these life cycles have." (Any of: birth, growth, reproduction, death; or "they go round in a circle".)

Vocabulary

life cycle, frogspawn, tadpole, froglet, caterpillar, chrysalis, hatch, metamorphosis, birth, growth, reproduction, death

Differentiation

- **Support:** give a group one animal's four cards at a time. Give the wheel sheet with the stage labels already written, to draw pictures beside.
- **Stretch:** "Is a tadpole a fish?" (No. It looks a bit like one and lives in water, but it is a young frog.) Or: add a fourth column to the table for the bean plant.
- **Tactile:** use the tactile stage cards. Children can model each stage with clay instead of drawing (an egg, a tadpole with a tail, a froglet with legs, a frog).

⚠ Safety

- Pictures only: never collect frogspawn, tadpoles, caterpillars or eggs from the wild. In some places it is against the law, and the animals can die.
- Check the clay for latex and wheat (some home-made dough contains wheat).
- Talk about death calmly and briefly, as part of every life cycle. Never ask children about their own pets or losses. Any child may sit out and sort the cards instead.
- This lesson is about animals only. If children ask about people, say simply that people have a life cycle too (babies grow into adults), and move on; the details of human reproduction are not part of this unit.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"A caterpillar and a butterfly are different animals."** Many children think this. The cards help: it is one animal at two stages of its life.
- **"A chick grows from the yolk like a seed."** Keep it simple: a chick grows inside the egg and hatches out. Eggs from a shop do not have chicks in them.

- **Not every frog has tadpoles.** A few kinds of frog hatch from the egg as tiny froglets. The frog here is a common example, not the only kind.
- The words "larva" and "pupa" are the scientific names for the caterpillar and chrysalis stages. Use them for stretch only.
- The stages are simplified: real animals change little by little, and the cards show only four moments.

Lesson 4: Like their parents, but not exactly

Unit overview - Previous: Animal life cycles - Next: Can the environment change a trait?

Back to the grade 3 year plan

Goal

Children learn what a trait is. They use a table about a made-up rabbit family to find which traits the young share with each parent, and see that no young rabbit is exactly like its parents or the others. Then they measure the class bean plants and see that plants from one packet are not all the same height.

Length

About 40 minutes: Opening 5, Main activity 25, Discussion 5, Closing check 5.

Materials

- The Brook Farm rabbit family: six cards (two parents and four young rabbits), each with a simple drawing and the rabbit's name and traits in words. One large set for the board.
- The Brook Farm rabbit table (below) on the board, and one copy for each pair.
- The six bean cups from the "Plenty of water" tray (P1-P6).
- For each pair: a 30 cm ruler and a pencil.
- The class height table on the board (two columns: cup, height in cm).
- A large dot plot line on the board or on paper, marked in centimetres from 0 to 30, and sticky dots or a marker.
- The Brook Farm bean table (below), in case the class plants have not grown yet.
- The frog and chicken stage cards from lesson 3 (for the opening).
- The watering chart.
- For blind or low-vision children: tactile rabbit cards (fur texture for colour: smooth fabric for white, rough fabric for brown; ears made of card that stand up or hang down; a raised dot for the nose spot); a ruler with raised marks or a talking tape measure; a dot plot made with pins or stickers on a corkboard so it can be felt.

The Brook Farm rabbit table (made up for this unit):

Rabbit	Fur colour	Ears	White spot on nose	Tail
Hazel (parent)	brown	stand up	yes	white
Pip (parent)	white	floppy	no	white
Bramble (young)	brown	floppy	no	white
Clover (young)	white	stand up	yes	white
Fern (young)	brown	stand up	no	white
Moss (young)	white	floppy	yes	white

The Brook Farm bean table (made up; ten bean plants from one packet, all given plenty of water, measured after three weeks):

Plant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Height (cm)	9	12	10	14	11	12	13	10	12	11

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

1. Hold up the frog cards. "Does a baby frog look like its parents?" (Not at first; a tadpole looks very different. An adult frog looks like its parents.) "Does a chick look like its parents?" (Quite a lot.)
2. Explain: "Something we can observe about a living thing, like its colour, its shape or how tall it grows, is called a **trait**. Today we look at which traits young animals and plants share with their parents."

✎ Main activity (25 min)

1. **The rabbit family (10 min).** Put up the rabbit cards and the table. Read the table together: Hazel and Pip are the parents, and Bramble, Clover, Fern and Moss are their young. Pairs answer, using their copy of the table:
    - "Which young rabbits have brown fur like Hazel?" (Bramble and Fern.)
    - "Which young rabbits have floppy ears like Pip?" (Bramble and Moss.)
    - "Which young rabbits have a white spot on the nose like Hazel?" (Clover and Moss.)
    - "Which trait do all six rabbits share?" (A white tail.)
    - "Is any young rabbit exactly the same as Hazel? As Pip? As each other?" (No. Each young rabbit has some traits like Hazel and some like Pip, and no two are the same.)
2. **Measuring the bean plants (10 min).** Bring out the six P cups. Show how to measure: stand the ruler on the compost next to the stem, with 0 at the compost, and read the number at the top of the highest leaf or the tip of the shoot, to the nearest centimetre. If two seeds grew in a cup, measure the taller one. Two pairs measure each cup, one after the other, and compare: "Did you get the same number? If not, measure again together." Write each height in the class height table. (Measure only the P cups today; the L cups wait until lesson 5.)
3. **A dot plot (5 min).** Each pair puts a dot above their plant's height on the dot plot line. If two plants have the same height, the second dot goes above the first. If the class plants have not grown yet, use the Brook Farm bean table instead.

✓ Discussion questions (5 min)

- "All these bean plants came from one packet and had the same water, light and compost. Are they all the same height?" (No. Usually they are different.)
- With the Brook Farm table: "What is the tallest? The shortest? Which height is most common?" (14 cm; 9 cm; 12 cm, three plants.)

- "Why might plants from one packet be different?" (Each seed is a little different, just as the young rabbits are; and small things in each cup can be different too, such as how deep the seed was planted. Scientists call differences in a group of the same kind **variation**.)
- "Are the young rabbits different from each other for the same reason?" (Partly: each one got a different mix of traits from its parents.)

✓ Closing check (5 min)

Ask each question; children answer on fingers, by pointing to the table, or in their own way.

1. "How many young rabbits have stand-up ears?" (2: Clover and Fern.)
2. "Is Moss exactly like Pip?" (No. Moss has white fur and floppy ears like Pip, but a white nose spot like Hazel.)
3. "Look at the Brook Farm bean table. How many centimetres taller is the tallest plant than the shortest?" (5 cm: 14 - 9 = 5.)
4. "What is a trait?" (Something we can observe about a living thing, such as its colour, shape or height.)

Vocabulary

trait, parent, young, similar, variation, centimetre, dot plot

Differentiation

- **Support:** use only two traits from the rabbit table (fur colour and ears). Hold the ruler steady for the child and let them read the number.
- **Stretch:** "Hazel and Pip have more young next year. Could one have brown fur and floppy ears? Could one have spotted fur?" (Brown fur and floppy ears is a mix we have already seen in Bramble. Spotted fur is not in the table, so we cannot tell from this table. This table is made up and too small to predict from.)
- **Tactile:** use the tactile rabbit cards: feel the fur texture, the ears and the nose dot. A blind child measures with a talking tape measure or a raised-mark ruler, with a partner checking the reading.

⚠ Safety

- Handle the plants gently: hold the ruler next to the stem, not against it.
- Wash hands after touching compost.
- Use only the made-up rabbit family and the plants. Never ask children which traits they got from which family member, and never compare children's own looks or heights. Some children are adopted, fostered or live with other family, and this is a private matter.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"The young are always a half-and-half mix."** Children may expect each young rabbit to be exactly between the parents (for example light brown). The table shows that traits often come in whole: brown or white, not a mixture. This is a pattern in a made-up table, not a rule; real families vary.
- **"All plants of one kind are the same."** The dot plot helps: the plants are the same kind, but not the same height.
- The standard leaves out how inheritance works and predicting traits. Keep to observing patterns. The stretch question is about why we cannot predict from a small made-up table.
- If two pairs measure the same cup differently, that is useful: talk about where to put 0 and which leaf counts as the top.

Lesson 5: Can the environment change a trait?

Unit overview - Previous: Like their parents, but not exactly

Back to the grade 3 year plan

Goal

Children measure both groups of bean plants, record the results in a table and a bar graph, and use them as evidence for a claim: the amount of water (part of the environment) changed how tall the plants grew. They sort trait cards into traits that come from the parents and traits changed by the environment.

Length

About 40 minutes: Opening 5, Main activity 25, Discussion 5, Closing check 5.

Teach this lesson in week 4 or 5, when most plants in the "Plenty of water" group are about 15-25 cm tall.

Materials

- All twelve bean cups (P1-P6 and L1-L6) in their two trays.
- For each pair: a 30 cm ruler and a pencil.
- The class results table on the board (below), and one copy for each pair.
- For each pair: a blank bar graph sheet (the twelve cups P1-P6 and L1-L6 along the bottom, height in cm up the side in twos from 0 to 30) and coloured pencils.
- The Brook Farm results table (below), in case the class plants have not grown well.
- The prediction slips from lesson 1.
- The claim frame on the board (below).
- Eight trait sort cards (below) and two heading cards: "From the parents" and "Changed by the environment". One large set for the board; one small set for each group of four.
- For the end-of-unit check: the rabbit table from lesson 4, the bean and frog cards, and the class dot plot.
- The watering chart.
- For blind or low-vision children: a ruler with raised marks or a talking tape measure; a bar graph made from stacks of interlocking cubes (one cube for every 2 cm) so that it can be felt; tactile or large-print sort cards.

The class results table:

Cup	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6
Height (cm)												

The Brook Farm results table (made up; six plants with plenty of water and six with a little water, from one packet, measured after four weeks):

Cup	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6
Height (cm)	18	21	19	22	20	20	8	10	7	9	11	9

The claim frame: "The plants with _____ water grew taller. Our evidence: _____. The only thing that was different was _____."

The eight trait sort cards (made up for this unit; the answer is in brackets and is not on the card):

1. Clover the rabbit has white fur, like Pip. (From the parents.)
2. Tibbs the Brook Farm kitten has stripes, like its mother. (From the parents.)
3. A Brook Farm lamb has a black face, like its mother. (From the parents.)
4. A sunflower grown from a seed of a yellow sunflower has yellow petals. (From the parents.)
5. A bean plant that got only a little water stayed small. (Changed by the environment.)
6. A bean plant kept in a dark shed grew pale and thin. (Changed by the environment.)
7. A bean plant on a windowsill leaned towards the window. (Changed by the environment.)
8. The Brook Farm sheepdog learned to come when the farmer whistles. (Changed by the environment: it learned it.)

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

1. Bring out both trays and stand them side by side. Ask: "What do you notice?" Let children talk to a partner. (Usually the P plants look taller and greener; some L plants may be small, droopy or dead.)
2. Read out two or three prediction slips from lesson 1. "Today we find out if our predictions were right, using measurements."

✎ Main activity (25 min)

1. **Measuring (8 min).** Measure every cup the same way as in lesson 4: ruler on the compost next to the stem, 0 at the compost, the top of the highest leaf or shoot, to the nearest centimetre; the taller plant if two grew. Each pair measures one cup (with fewer than 12 pairs, some measure two). If a plant has died or never came up, write 0 and a note: "did not grow". Write every height in the class results table.
2. **Bar graph (9 min).** Pairs copy the results into their own table and draw a bar for each cup on the bar graph sheet. They colour the P bars in one colour and the L bars in another, and write P or L under each bar so that colour is not the only clue. If the class plants have not grown well, use the Brook Farm results table instead, and say so.
3. **A claim with evidence (3 min).** Pairs complete the claim frame together, by writing, drawing or telling an adult. (Example with the Brook Farm table: "The plants with plenty of water grew taller. Our evidence: the shortest P plant was 18 cm and the tallest L plant was only 11 cm. The only thing that was different was the water.")
4. **Sorting traits (5 min).** Read each sort card aloud. Groups of four put each card under one of the two headings. Go through the answers together.

✓ Discussion questions (5 min)

- "Were our predictions right?" (Compare with the slips. Either answer is fine; scientists change their ideas when the evidence says so.)
- "All twelve seeds came from one packet. So why were the L plants shorter?" (Because they got less water. The water is part of their environment. The environment changed a trait: how tall they grew.)
- "Were all the P plants exactly the same height?" (Usually not. That is the variation we saw in lesson 4. But the P plants were taller as a group.)
- "Can a trait come from the parents AND be changed by the environment?" (Yes. A bean plant gets its kind of leaves and flowers from its parents, but how tall it grows also depends on its water and light.)

✓ Closing check (5 min)

Ask each question; children answer by pointing to a heading card, on fingers, or in their own way.

1. "A puppy has long ears like its father. From the parents, or changed by the environment?" (From the parents.)
2. "A plant in a dry pot grew only a few small leaves. Which?" (Changed by the environment.)
3. "In the Brook Farm table, how many centimetres taller is P4 than L4?" (13 cm: 22 - 9 = 13.)
4. "Why was our test fair?" (Only the water was different; the seeds, compost, cups, light and room were the same.)

Then see children one at a time for the end-of-unit check (see Assessment in the unit overview), during this lesson's follow-up time or the next week.

Vocabulary

environment, trait, evidence, claim, results, bar graph, inherited (stretch)

Differentiation

- **Support:** give the bar graph sheet with the P1 bar already drawn as an example. Give the claim frame with the answers as picture choices to circle (a full jug or a jug with a drop; a tall plant or a short plant).
- **Stretch:** "Some traits are **inherited**: they come from the parents. Write one more card of your own for each heading." Or: "What could we test next, keeping everything else the same?" (For example light: one tray at the window and one further away.)
- **Tactile:** use the cube bar graph: one stack of cubes for each cup, one cube for every 2 cm (rounding to the nearest cube). A blind child compares the stacks by touch.

⚠ Safety

- Handle the plants gently. Wash hands after touching compost.

- If some L plants wilted or died, say so plainly and calmly: that is a result of the test. It is fine to water all the plants well after the lesson and see whether the small ones recover.
- Use only plant and animal examples. Never compare children's own traits, bodies or heights.
- At the end of the unit, plants can be planted outside by an adult, given to the school garden, or composted.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"The L plants were just bad seeds."** Ask: "Did the P seeds and the L seeds come from the same packet?" (Yes.) "Then what was different?" (The water.) This is why the fair test matters.
- **"Environment means nature or forests."** Here, a living thing's environment means everything around it and everything it gets: water, light, food, warmth, and even what it learns.
- **Results that do not match.** Sometimes one L plant grows taller than a P plant. That is real data. Look at the whole group, not one plant, and talk about why one plant might be different (a seed planted shallower, or a cup nearer the window).
- **Card 8** shows that learning counts too: the sheepdog was not born knowing the whistle. The standard's core idea says characteristics can come from the environment, "which can range from diet to learning".
- Card 6 builds on grade 1, where children saw that a plant needs light to grow green, and card 7 on the plant bending towards a window.