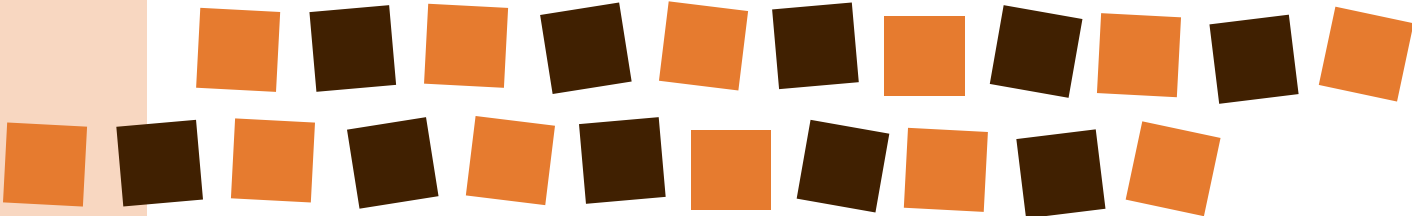


**Sacred Food**

**YOUTH**

**Sunday School  
and Group Activities**

National Council of Churches USA



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Food is a necessity of life and every living thing is dependent upon its nutrients. We need food for energy, for growth, and for survival. We need it for fuel to keep us going and moving in the world. We approach the ritual of meals—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—again and again, but rarely pause to consider the miracle of food.

Food is not merely fuel for our bodies. It is nourishment for our bodies and our souls. When we consider food as more than a commodity, as a miraculous result of the mingling of sun, rain, soil, and seed, we are swept into the deep mysteries of life and begin to recognize and appreciate the interdependence of all of God's creation

These lessons are intended for use in Sunday School classroom or as youth group activities. The lessons can be modified to fit the needed age group and style of group. The lessons were devised as a way for youth to explore ways to honor our relationship with food. It is an invitation to explore how food comes to us and how to value it. Though this material is not a comprehensive study of all of the current issues around farming and food production, it is a tool that can be used to teach young people how to live and eat more mindfully.



The first session, written for lower and upper elementary school age children in mind, introduces the concept that all of life is inter-related—that one action can unleash a chain reaction, and that environmental problems in one country can have tremendous effects across several continents. Teaching about the interwoven nature of life, and realizing that the Earth is a shared planet, fosters a sense of responsibility and a desire to care for God's Earth. We can then nourish it, just as we are nourished by it. In this way, our relationships with all of life are marked by mutual gratitude and joy.

This session, *Respect for the Web of Life*, expounds upon the attitude of appreciation by delving into the importance of respecting the diversity of life. God created a world that is teeming with diverse elements, organisms, and species. Humankind is but one of those species. The session cautions us to guard against assigning ourselves too much importance because we have been equipped with unique faculties. Each aspect of Creation is valuable because it is a unique embodiment of the essence of God and every part of Creation has a role to play in the collective work of sustaining the whole.

The session, *Growing Food*, written with upper elementary school age children in mind explores humankind's role within Creation. As a caretaker assigned by God, it is our job to protect and maintain the gifts we have been given—to till and protect the Earth. Unfortunately, it is easy to forget that this is our responsibility. When we move through our lives on autopilot, it becomes very tempting to exploit the Earth for personal gain. Studying the role of food, and the processes involved in bringing food from farms to our dinner plates, reminds us that every aspect of creation is important and must be honored with reverence. Even the smallest opening of awareness about the connection between our very existence and the generous provisions that come from the Earth often inspire us to more disciplined care.

In the session, *Treat Animals Humanely*, written primarily for lower elementary school age children, consideration is given to how we treat the animals around

us. Industrialized agriculture assigns value to animals based almost solely on their monetary worth for people. Tremendous suffering and huge sacrifices are endured by animals for the benefit and pleasure of humankind. We must remember the interconnected web of life. We must remember to live carefully and respectfully with all other forms of life. In this remembering, we will recall our role as caretakers and express our gratitude and appreciation for farm animals by the way we treat them.

The session, *Provide for All People*, in this series, written for lower and upper elementary school children deals with the issue of hunger. We ponder questions like “why are there hungry people in the world?” and “is there enough food to feed everybody?” We examine the complexities of the relationship between current food production practices and the suffering of the hungry. The intention of this session is to dispel the myth that “this is just the way it is,” that there will always be the haves and the have-nots, and to debunk the attitude that we can't make a difference.

## Contemplative Lesson Elements: Labyrinth Walks

In each lesson, regardless of the intended age, it is suggested to utilize a labyrinth walk. This contemplative lesson element can also be replaced by silent meditation or other contemplative elements.

The pace of life today is often so swift that there seem to be few quiet moments for observation, reflection, and contemplation. Only the most disciplined make regular time for deliberate “stillness.” Yet, studies have shown that these practices have many physical, mental, and emotional benefits. Within the context of faith, contemplative prayer and meditation provide space for communion with the mysteries of God and allow for a deepening of awareness and a transformation of relationships. Thus, our movement through life becomes more mindful.

This series utilizes the practice of walking a labyrinth each session as a means to help foster the discipline of contemplative prayer within the lives of youth. It is meant to give them time and space to slow down, if only for a short bit. Certainly there are challenges to attempting this type of exercise with a group of youth



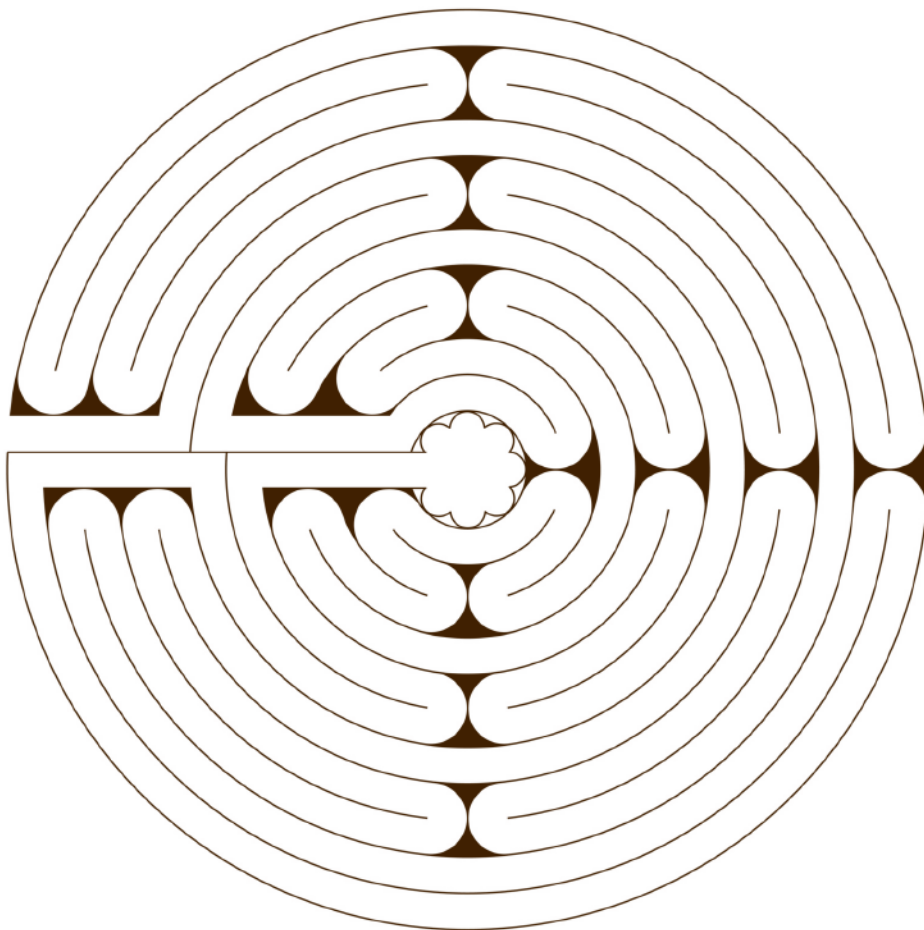
(they may view it as a race, or they may pay more attention to their friends than to their own walking, they may giggle or roll their eyes), but the repetition of deliberately putting one foot in front of the other and the gentle encouragement to listen for God by focusing on the day's scripture or on their breath will plant seeds of mindfulness. The promotion of their own contemplative inner knowing at the beginning of the sessions is intended to ritualize the time together and enhance the children's experience of the lesson.

If possible, mark a labyrinth on an open floor using masking tape; use the picture below as a guide. Introduce the practice of walking a labyrinth during the first session. Emphasize to the youth that walking a labyrinth is a type of body prayer, a walking meditation. Therefore, it is a practice done with no talking so that we can listen for divine guidance.

Depending on the makeup of your group, you may want to establish some sort of order for their walking so that the youth don't all begin at once. This may not be necessary, however, in which case you can let them go

to the labyrinth as they are ready. Invite them to walk, meditatively, stopping or pausing as they feel led. Playing quiet instrumental music can help them focus; one good music CD is *Labyrinth Walk* by Martin Gregory. As individuals complete the labyrinth walk, have them return to the circle to sit silently while others finish. Encourage those who have finished to practice a seated meditation by focusing on their breath. For some, this may be very difficult as it is a learned discipline. Allowing them to practice it in a safe environment, even as they lose focus, is important. If desired, have Bibles, blank paper, pencils and markers available so they can reread the day's scripture passage and reflect on it by journaling or drawing a picture.

**Note:** If laying out a walking labyrinth on the floor is not possible, provide copies of the picture below to each child to use as a finger labyrinth. The same exercise can be done by tracing the labyrinth with one's finger. Here, the focus is still upon contemplative prayer and listening for God.



# Respect for the Web of Life

*Suggested ages: Lower and Upper Elementary age.*

*Time needed: 45-60 minutes*

## Teacher Reflection and Subject Background

*Scripture: Psalm 104*



The Earth and all that is in it belong to God. There is not one aspect of Creation that is outside of the realm of divine magnificence. Sun, moon, water, land, animals, plants, and people were all declared by God to be good works (Genesis 1), each one serving to sustain the whole of Creation. Streams flow so that animals have water to drink. Trees provide habitat for birds. Plants grow as a provision of food for people and animals. The moon marks the seasons and the sun distinguishes night from day. Therefore, “the earth is satisfied with the fruit of [God’s] work” (Ps. 104:13) because God established the whole of Creation as a balanced community of species and ecosystems.

This ordered harmony can be upset, however, by changes to the natural world. Many changes occur at the hands of human beings who desire more con-

venience, more money, more power. Some occur as a result of ignorance on the part of us all by disregarding how our choices affect other organisms with whom we share this space.

The holiness of God is in all of Creation. We just have to see it. When we pay attention and take time to look at this great sight or that one, we create the possibility of communing with God in such a way that we come close enough to the mystery to stand back in reverence and awe. To be able to move through life seeing the holiness in all living beings and then proclaiming gratitude for their intrinsic value will lead us to right relationships with them. We will encounter earth, air, water, plants, animals, and other people with an attitude of mindfulness for it all, not just ourselves. Our actions, then, will reflect our respect.

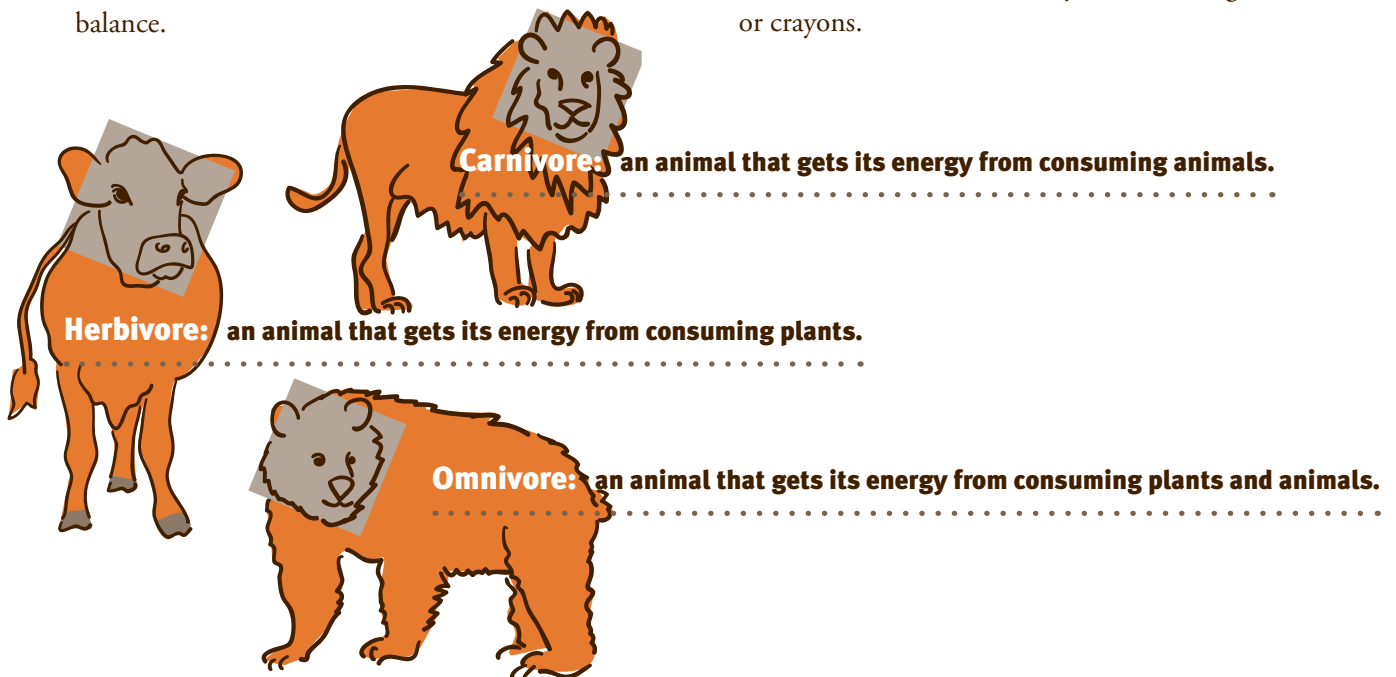
## Summary of Lesson

**Discover:** Encourage thoughtful consideration of Creation using Psalm 104.

**Study:** Guide the group through an activity to foster the idea that all of creation is interwoven in a delicate balance.

**Apply:** Identify ways that human choices impact Creation. Determine ways we can serve as caretakers of the Earth.

**Materials Needed:** ball of yarn, name tags, markers or crayons.





## Opening Prayer *5 minutes*

O God,  
It is a privilege to be here on this  
planet Earth,  
A creation of yours so amazing  
That fire can ravage and yet  
renew a forest,  
And water can fall down as rain  
and nourish the dry places.  
And how is it that this ball of  
rock upon which we live can  
provide soil for the trees and  
grasses, and the grain and  
fruits which serve as fuel for  
animals and for us?  
The mastery of your creation is  
beyond measure, God.  
So let us simply say "Thanks  
be to You." And may our lives  
reflect our gratitude.  
Amen.

## Discover *15 minutes*

Introduce the topic of Creation. Ask the group to name aspects of creation that are not man-made (i.e. sun, plants, animals, people), and write their responses on a large sheet of paper to post on the wall. Read Psalm 104. Which of their answers were listed in this account of Creation? Add any to the list that were not previously mentioned, but were identified in the scripture. Discuss how the various parts of Creation are interrelated. For example, talk about how the water provides drink for animals and nourishes the trees which in turn provide homes for the birds. Ask how humans fit into the Creation picture. What do verses 14 and 23 say about people's place in Creation?

Explain that one way, a very important way, that people can learn about their place in Creation is by listening to what it says and to what God says through it. Listening is a discipline. Listening to God and to what God has created is a spiritual discipline. It is a way in which we remain faithful to our relationship with God. Tell the group that one way to develop this discipline is to use the practice of walking a labyrinth. Explain how to walk the labyrinth (refer to the introduction to this series). Then read Psalm 104 again, slowly and contemplatively. Ask the children to meditate on (or think about) this scripture as they walk. Remind them, if necessary, that this is a time of listening.

## Study *15-20 minutes*

To further encourage the children's thoughts of an interconnected web of Creation, do the following activity with the group. It is not necessary for the facilitator of this activity to be an expert in science; the "success" of this activity is in the leader's ability to help the children realize that people are only one part of God's Creation.

Give the definition of an ecosystem (a system made up of a community of animals, plants, and bacteria interrelated together with its physical and chemical environment). Have the children create a list of living things that exist in the chosen ecosystem. Make sure the list is visible to the group and that it includes various types of herbivores, carnivores, and plants, as well as things like sunlight, rain, and mountains. Assign each child an item from the list and ask them to write the name of their part of Creation and illustrate it on a name tag. Have them put on their tags.

Have the group stand in a circle and choose one person to stand in the middle. Give that child the ball of yarn and ask that individual to declare her "name" (what she represents in the ecosystem) and then name another aspect of the ecosystem upon which she depends for survival. For example, a bird may depend



on a worm or fresh water, while corn might depend on the sun or soil and soil may depend on clean water and nutrients. The child then tosses the ball of yarn to that child that represents that part of Creation, holding on to the end of the string. Repeat the process until each person is holding a piece of the yarn. Once the yarn comes to either water or the sun, the individual playing that part should then toss the yarn to an organism she supports. Some people may get the ball of yarn more than once.

Once each person is holding a piece of the yarn, invite the group to look at the web as a whole. Remind the students that it represents interdependence. Then state a man-made change in the environment such as polluted waterways or deforestation. Any individual representing an organism potentially overcome by that change drops the piece of yarn and exits the circle or sits down. Any organism relying on the affected organism will also be influenced and should drop the yarn. Eventually nearly all organisms are affected. Invite the group to reflect on the web now.

For younger kids, if time permits, you can use the attached Activity Page as a drawing and coloring exercise. For this activity you will need pencils and/or crayons. Instruct the children to draw or color in the faces of the different types of animals: omnivore, herbivore, and carnivore.

### **Apply** 5-10 minutes

Facilitate a discussion about what happens when there is a change in the ecosystem? Are the various aspects of Creation still able to depend on each other in the ways which God refers in Psalm 104 when changes occur? What responsibility do people have to care for the created world and not harm it? How do people work to “bring forth food from the earth” (Ps. 104:14) in a

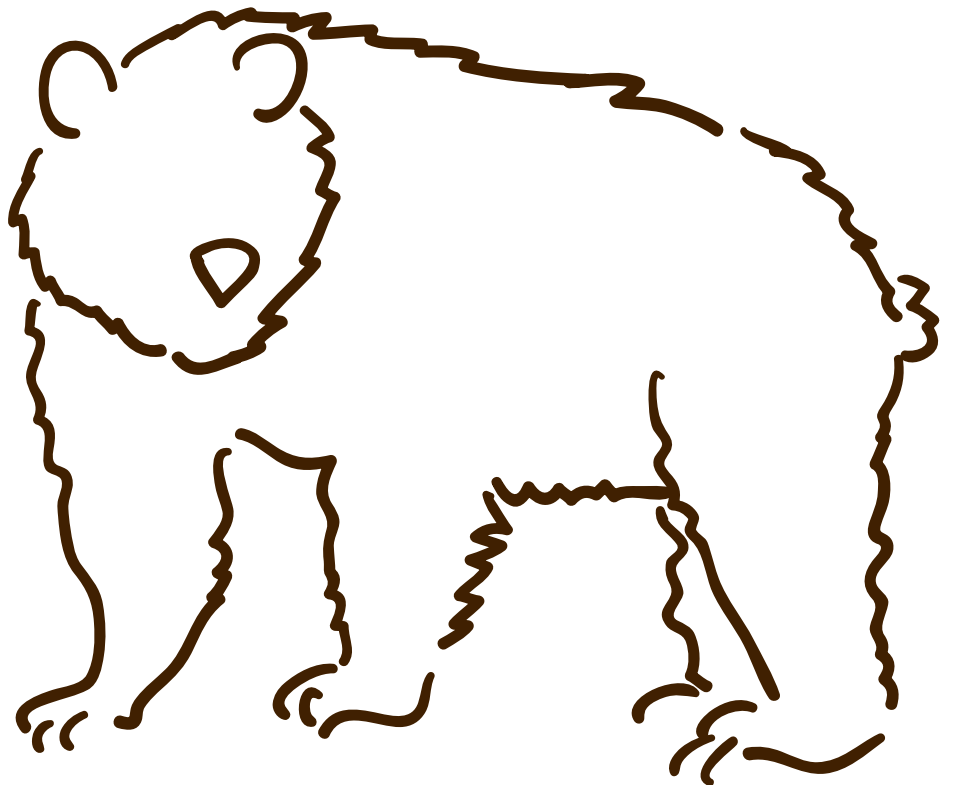
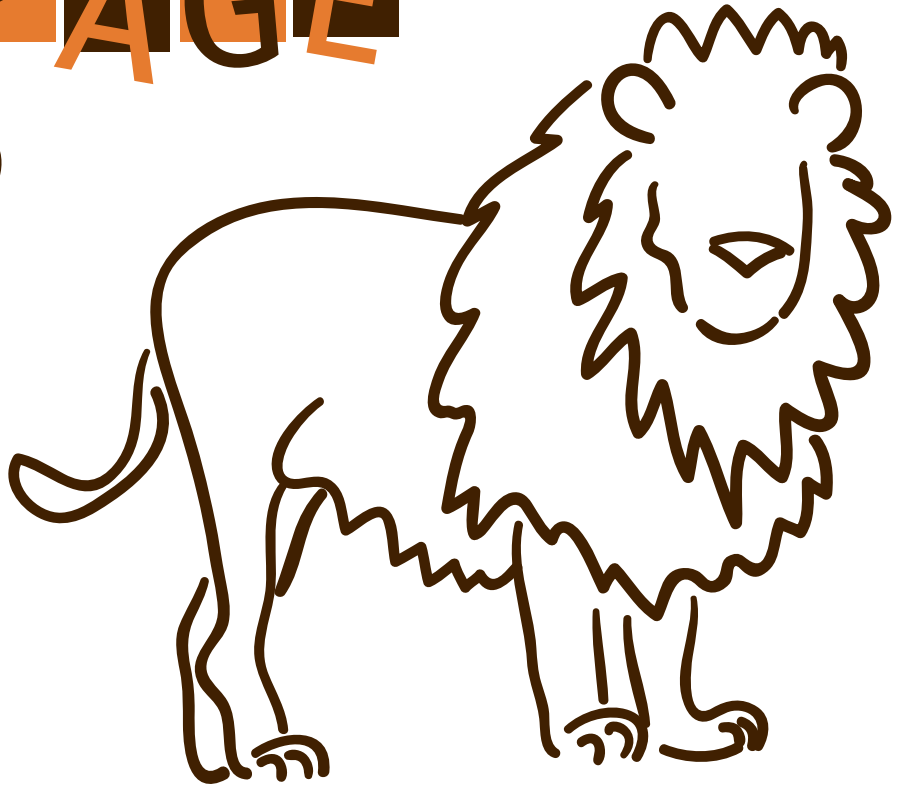
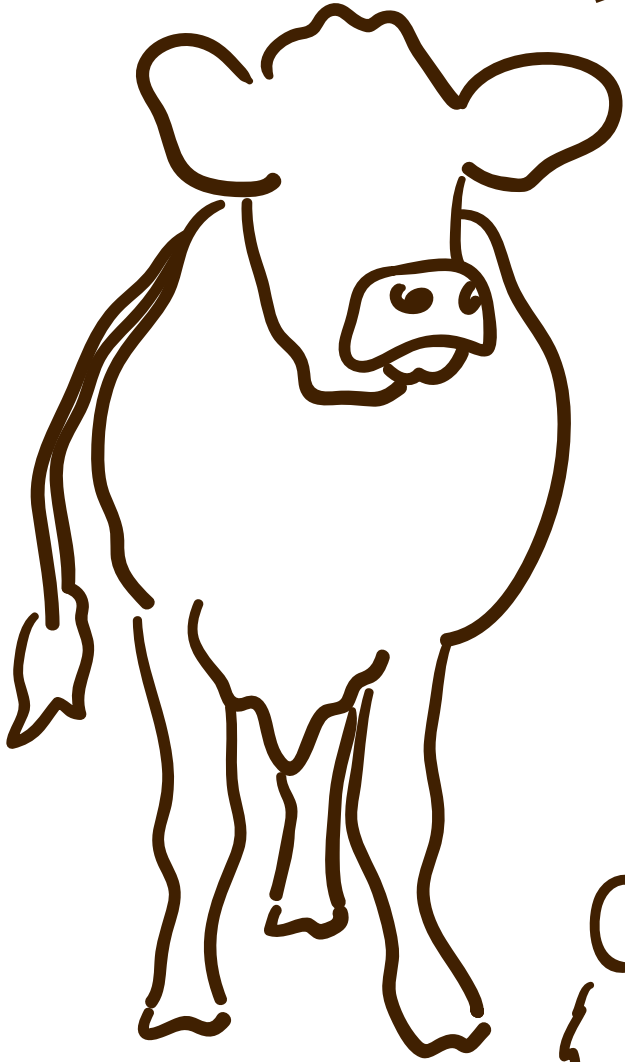
way which honors the natural ecosystems? How does human activity positively and negatively affect the food chain and the web of life? What can human beings do to prevent the extinction of organisms? What is most important for a species’ survival? Why should we care whether other species survive or not?

### **Conclusion** 5 minutes

Have the kids remove their shoes as a show of respect for the holiness of the gathered group and for God, stand or sit in a circle, and repeat after the leader the following prayer line by line.

*Creator God, we realize that  
we are but one strand of an  
intricately woven braid. Help us  
to honor all your world by doing  
our part to sustain it.  
For the gift of the sun, land,  
water, and air, we give you  
thanks, O God  
For the gift of all plants and trees,  
we give you thanks, O God  
For the gift of all animals, we give  
you thanks, O God  
For the gift of all people, we give  
you thanks, O God.  
May we honor You as our Creator  
by treating all these gifts with  
kindness.  
And may we be nourished by our  
dependence on the mysteries of  
their holiness.  
Amen.*

# ACTIVITY PAGE





# Growing Food in Ways that Protect and Heal Creation

*Suggested ages: Upper Elementary age*  
*Time needed: 45-60 minutes*

## Teacher Reflection and Subject Background

*Scripture: Genesis 2: 8-9, 15-16*  
*Psalm 65: 9-13*

**G**enesis 2 tells us that God planted a garden filled with every tree that is good for food, and put man in the garden to till and keep it. We are the thus caretakers of the garden Earth and are called to maintain and preserve what God established. Growing food—no matter its complexity and work—is no exception. All living things rely on food for nourishment. It is a great privilege and tremendous responsibility to care for the garden. It requires giving careful consideration to how we use the God's gifts of air, soil, and water when we produce food so that we ensure that all life on Earth flourishes.

Unfortunately, though, we are increasingly disconnected from the food system that we all rely upon. We often eat even though we have no idea where our food comes from or how it was produced. We are alienated from the created world, and we have forgotten that our very lives are dependent on the soil of the Earth, the plants and trees that spring forth from it, the water

that nourishes, and the sun which gives energy. It is not corporate food producers or supermarkets to whom we owe our gratitude for the bounty of the Earth, but the goodwill of God.

As Christians, then, we are called to remember our role as caretakers. How do we understand our connection to the food system? How do we live out our role? What can we do to tend the garden during a time when more attention is given to economy than to ecology? How do we respond when giant corporations put small family farms out of business and produce their products with little knowledge or concern for the health of the land? What do we do when the business of producing food uses much more energy than it creates? The pastures, hills, meadows, and valleys were created to shout and sing together for joy (Psalm 65:12-13) because of their fertility. It is up to us to provide stewardship for God's Earth so that their joyful singing is heard in the future.

## Summary of Lesson

**Discover:** Explore the idea that sustainable agriculture is not a new concept; it comes from God.

**Study:** Look at the Genesis 2 passages to understand how God intended for us to be caretakers. Use an activity to illustrate how best to care for God's bountiful garden.

**Apply:** Encourage thankfulness for God's bounty.

**Materials Needed:** four small paper bags filled with objects of five different colors (e.g., colored candy, poker chips, marbles).

## Opening Prayer

*You, O God, are the great provider.  
From the bounty of the Earth all living things are nourished.  
Our own hunger and thirst are satisfied by the fruits of Your creation.  
Help us, O God, to realize our need to serve as caretakers for the garden Earth which we call home.  
And may we experience the great joy that comes from such caring.  
Amen.*



## Discover *10-15 minutes*

Introduce the term “sustainable agriculture.” Ask what the group understands about this concept. What does it mean to sustain something? How do we maintain, care for God’s Earth while producing food for ourselves? To practice sustainable agriculture means to cultivate soil, grow crops, and raise livestock in a way that is just, without harming or depleting the Earth’s bounty or hurting other people or animals.

Read together Psalms 65: 9-13. Ask the group to reflect on God’s involvement in agriculture as they walk the labyrinth. Remind them to listen for God. What does this scripture say about the fertility of the Earth? How does the Earth respond to its own fertility? (with joyful singing and shouting, verse 13) Who is the provider of such goodness? God has designed the Earth to be fertile, to provide food and to give seed so that more food can be grown. The joy of Creation is that it endures forever. There is planting, growing, harvesting, planting, birth, life, death, and more birth. Read the passage again as they are walking.

## Study *15-20 minutes*

Read Genesis 2:8-9 and 15-16. Facilitate a brief discussion about the group’s understanding of these passages. If God is the one who makes the Earth fertile so that we have food to eat (as Psalms 65:9-13 suggests), what is our role? What does it mean to till and keep the Earth?

Have the students list out what is needed for food to grow: sunlight, soil, air, and water. In four different paper bags labeled with each plant “need” (sun, soil, air, and water) place multi-colored objects (you can use poker chips, colored candy, or jelly beans) making sure that bags have only one type of color in each bag and enough objects in each bag so that each student can grab one handful of objects from each bag.

Then, designate one color as a contaminant and place several objects of that color in each bag except the “sunlight” bag. Instruct the students that they are “plants” and need the proper amount of sun, soil, air, and water to survive. Tell them to grab objects from each bag and put them out in front of them at their desk or table. After each student has their “need” objects in front of them, tell them that you will now look at what their particular needs are. List out the following:

Sunlight = 3 objects  
Soil = 3 objects  
Air = 3 objects  
Water = 3 objects

Then review with each student how they, as a plant, did survival-wise.

### **Sunlight**

More than 3: plant withered from too much sun;  
Less than 3: plant didn’t grow and was weak.

### **Soil**

More or equal to 3: no impact on the plant;  
Less than 3: plant didn’t have enough nutrients and didn’t grow as well.

### **Air**

More or less than 3: no impact on the plant.

### **Water**

More than 3: plant drowned and died  
Less than 3: plant died from drought.



In the second round, tell the students to collect only the number of objects that they need for their plants. Make note of any students that had a contaminated object in their pile of objects. Explain to the students that this represents pollution or toxics in the air, soil, or water and that it would negatively impact how the plant could grow or could be passed onto humans as we consume it. Discuss with the students ways to prevent these contaminants (e.g. buy organic food, grow own food, etc.). Discuss with the class what they think God intended in regards to tilling and keeping the garden. The following questions may stimulate discussion. What if they learned that some part of their meal was produced on a huge farm that used lots of chemicals to grow their vegetables? The chemicals seeped into the soil and made their way into nearby rivers and streams. What if those chemicals prevent other plants from growing? Or they cause people or animals to be sick? What if animals lose their habitat and die out as a result of the way the land is used? If the children knew that these conditions were the consequences of producing the food they eat, would they choose to eat those same foods? Or would they choose differently?

**sustainable  
agriculture is an  
agricultural practice  
that grows crops  
and raises livestock  
without harming or  
depleting the Earth's  
bounty or hurting  
other people or  
animals**

### **Apply** *15 minutes*

To till and keep the garden suggests that we have a relationship with the land, water, and the seasons. It is a relationship that is mutually beneficial. We care for the Earth and the Earth provides us and every living thing with food. When we stop caring for the Earth as God intends, the effects can be quite serious.

What does this have to do with us? How are we involved in the business of agriculture? If we are not the people who own the food companies, work in the fields, transport the livestock, package the food, or cook it, then who are we in the food system? Point out the fact that we all play a role and that most of us are the consumers, the eaters of food. What power do we have to make changes so that the Earth, animals, and other people are not harmed to supply us with food?

Ask the group what they know of the story of The Last Supper. Read it from Luke 22:14-20. Explore with them the mysteries of this story. Talk about the significance of communing with God. Communion is celebrated in churches as a way of remembering Jesus; it invites us into divine mystery. Talk about the fact that there are many scriptures referencing food and farming throughout the Bible. Jesus told stories of planting seeds and feeding hungry people. Have the group look us some of these scriptures. There is a sacred value to food and agriculture that our culture has nearly forgotten. Food is a holy mystery; it is of God. It is not just fuel. Every day it provides opportunity for us to commune with God, but we have to be paying attention. Just as Moses went to see the burning bush, we must see our food as alive with energy for us. And we must approach it with gratitude, integrity, and wonder.

Pass around a loaf of bread and have the children give thanks for all parts of Creation that came together to make it (seed for wheat, sun, rain, soil, etc.). This can be done in turns or as a group.



## Conclusion

We are all part of the agricultural system and we have been since the beginning of time. Everything that we do is supported by the nutrients we take in through food. Caring for the planet and all that is in it is no easy task, but it is our responsibility. And, we cannot do it effectively if we think only of ourselves. We need to consider how each aspect of Creation is affected by the ways in which we grow our food. So, let our tending of the garden reflect our connection to and appreciation of the interconnected web of life by growing, producing, and consuming food in ways that protect and heal all of Creation. Have the kids stand or sit in a circle, and repeat after the leader the following prayer line by line.

*Loving Creator, Forgive us  
when we are lazy and are  
concerned only with our  
selves.  
Help us to appreciate the work  
to which you have called us,  
to keep and care for all the  
earth.  
And may we be disciplined  
to respond to this call with  
courage, faithfulness and joy.  
For the gift of the sun, land,  
water, and air, we give you  
thanks, O God  
For the gift of all plants and  
trees, we give you thanks,  
O God  
For the gift of all animals, we  
give you thanks, O God  
For the gift of all people, we  
give you thanks, O God.  
May we honor You as our  
Creator by treating all these  
gifts with kindness.  
And may we be nourished  
by our dependence on the  
mysteries of their holiness.  
Amen.*

# Treat Animals Humanely

*Suggested ages: Lower Elementary age*

*Time needed: 45-60 minutes*

## Teacher Reflection and Subject Background

*Scripture: Proverbs 12:10*

*Proverbs 27: 23-27*

**W**ith the advancement of technology, our lives have become increasingly convenient. This is certainly true in regard to food consumption. We can visit a drive-thru for a hamburger at the fast food restaurant down the street, or get a grab-to-go sandwich from the corner convenience store. We can have pizza delivered to our doorstep or by simply pulling one out of the freezer. While these options afford some benefits to us, there are hidden costs that should be considered and weighed.

The rise of technology has meant that most of us have little to do with producing our own food. Someone somewhere somehow does it for us. But just what is it that they do to make our food? How are the cows, goats, pigs, and chickens raised? Few of us know. Yet, Proverbs 27:23 gives the instruction to “know the condition of your flocks.” In the same way that God intends for us to tend and keep the garden Earth, we are to “give attention to [our] herds.” To attend to farm animals means recognizing the reciprocal relationship we have with them. The key word here is relationship; we are to appreciate the gifts of the other, to know and

be known. Proverbs 12:10 says “the righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.” When people lose sight of the innate value of animals and regard them only as commodities that can be used for our self-serving purposes, our cruelty is often masked as mercy.

Dominion over the Earth is given to humankind (Genesis 1:26-28) for the purpose of stewardship where the needs of the whole outweigh the needs of only a few. We are meant to care for all of life, to practice the Golden Rule even as it applies to animals. Caring for animals, however, can cost money. Since money is valued so highly in our culture, its grip on us often takes precedence over the welfare of animals. We find ways to justify factory farms that overpack animals into small cages and administer growth hormones so the animals grow bigger and faster. What do these methods suggest about our ability to be good stewards? What responsibility do we all have for the ways in which farm animals are kept? What kind of treatment illustrates a holy respect for them?

## Summary of Lesson

**Discover:** Consider our responsibility for the care of farm animals using Proverbs 27:23-27.

**Study:** Facilitate an activity in which the children can explore the needs of animals and how those needs are or are not met with current farming practices.

**Apply:** Brainstorm ideas about how we can responsibly care for farm animals.

**Materials Needed:** Bibles, animal masks for each individual (make copies on cardstock of farm animal faces from clip art and glue or tape to paint stir sticks or dowels) supplies to decorate masks (markers, glue, cotton balls, etc.), supplies for “Ask the Animals” game (see below), laminated copies of The Five Freedoms resource page on colorful paper to be used as place-mats



## Opening Prayer

*You are the great shepherd, loving God.  
You look after your sheep with kindness,  
and go in search for even one if it is missing.  
Before you covered the Earth with waters,  
You made certain that every species of animal would survive because You value them all.  
And to us, Your people, You have given dominion over the animals.  
You have entrusted us to care for them as You do, with an abiding love.  
Help us to know their needs and attend to their welfare as they so often do for us.  
Amen.*

## Discover 15 minutes

Ask the group to get into a comfortable seated position. When they are quiet and still, ask them to close their eyes and listen as you read Proverbs 27:23-27. What do they hear when they listen to this scripture? Inform the group that an addition has been made to the labyrinth for today's walk; point out the animal masks that are placed around the labyrinth. Ask each person to select one of these masks after they have exited the labyrinth. It doesn't matter which one they get, but it is important that they make their selection quietly so that the others can finish their walk with limited distraction. You may want to allow the children to begin to color or decorate their masks while they are waiting for everyone to finish. Slowly read the passage one more time. Allow the group to walk the labyrinth, meditating on this passage. Remind them that this is a way of praying, of communing with God, of taking time for this important relationship.

## Study 20 minutes

Give the group a few minutes to finish coloring or decorating their masks. As they do, read Genesis 2:19-20a. Ask the children to imagine what it would be like to be the one to name every living thing. Some of us may have pets at home that we gave names. Somebody gave us our names. With naming, our relationship with it grows, especially if we spend time with it observing it, talking with it, petting it. Point out that the mask they are working on is of a particular kind of farm animal whose species already has a name. Your particular animal, however, does not have its own name. You get to name your animal and write the name on it.

Ask if anyone would like to share what they heard from the scripture passage, Proverbs 27:23-27. What does it say we should know about? Does this instruction apply to us or only to those who "work" with flocks? Read together another verse from Proverbs, 12:10. Ask the children what they think it means? How can mercy be cruel? Play a game called Ask the Animals to help the children begin to know about the condition of farm animals and their needs.

## Playing Ask the Animals

**Materials Needed:** Need cards, Condition cards, 2 poster boards (one labeled "Needs Met" and the other "Needs Not Met"), one copy of The Five Freedoms page, tape

1. Read out loud the need cards for each farm animals. Note: read the top part of a Need card, but not the related Need at the bottom
2. Show them a Conditions card for each animal and ask the students if the animals' needs are being met.
3. Ask them to make their animal noise (i.e. moo if they are a cow, cluck if a chicken, etc.) or have them raise their hands if the picture shows that their needs are being met. Then tape the picture on the appropriate poster board.
4. Ask each child to state what need their animal has. (Note: you can call the kids by their animal's names.)



After going through all the cards, show the kids the Five Freedoms page. Explain that these freedoms have been determined by animal welfare groups to be a useful checklist for assessing animal farming practices. Why are animal farming practices employed that do not meet the needs of the animals (economics, lack of awareness, belief that animals don't feel pain or emotions, justification that they're going to die anyway)? Look again at the two scripture passages in Proverbs. What do they say about the righteous compared to the wicked? What do they say about the value of the animals compared with the value of riches (money)?

If time remains, read and discuss the following scripture passages with the group.

- Genesis 1:26-28 (What does it mean to have dominion? Stewardship?)
- Exodus 20:8-11 (What is Sabbath rest?)
- Deuteronomy 22:4 (How do we show care for animals?)

### **Apply** 15 minutes

If we think of farm animals strictly in terms of sausage, hot dogs, scrambled eggs, milk, and hamburgers, then we will care little about their quality of life. Our own interests will take precedence over the interests of the animals. We will be less likely to recognize their intrinsic God-given value and show them respect. But something more is asked of us—to know their needs and conditions and show them proper care. What do you know about animal farming that you did not know before today? Does having this knowledge make you want to behave differently? If so, what can you do? Let the group brainstorm ideas about how they can change their behavior and what they can do to help stop animal abuses. Some ideas might include eating meat and dairy products that are produced in kind ways (e.g., free range eggs).

## Conclusion

When we understand that we are part of an interconnected web of God's creation and that all other parts deserve our respect, we are more likely to live lives guided by God's values, which emphasize kindness, justice, and humility. Often this way of living requires great courage and discipline. We can acknowledge our society's treatment of farm animals for the production of food and do what we can as individuals to change our own. It requires education, care of one's resources, hard work, and a recognition and appreciation of God's provisions.

Hand out the laminated copies of The Five Freedoms page. Inform the children that they can use these as place mats when they eat as a reminder of our responsibility to care for God's animals.

## Closing Prayer

*God, our lives are full of freedoms:  
freedom to eat and drink,  
freedom to get an education,  
freedom to work and play,  
freedom to worship the way in  
which we choose.  
For all of these and many more, we  
say "thanks be to You."  
May we do as much as we can to  
ensure and protect the freedoms  
of farm animals who often go  
unnoticed, unappreciated,  
unloved.  
We ask for courage and strength  
for this journey.  
Amen.*

# 5

# FREEDOMS

1

**Freedom from hunger and thirst** by providing fresh water and the right amount of food to keep them fit.

2

**Freedom from discomfort** by making sure that animals have the right kind of environment including shelter and somewhere comfortable to rest.

3

**Freedom from pain, injury, and disease** by preventing them from getting ill or injured and by making sure animals are diagnosed and treated rapidly if they do.

4

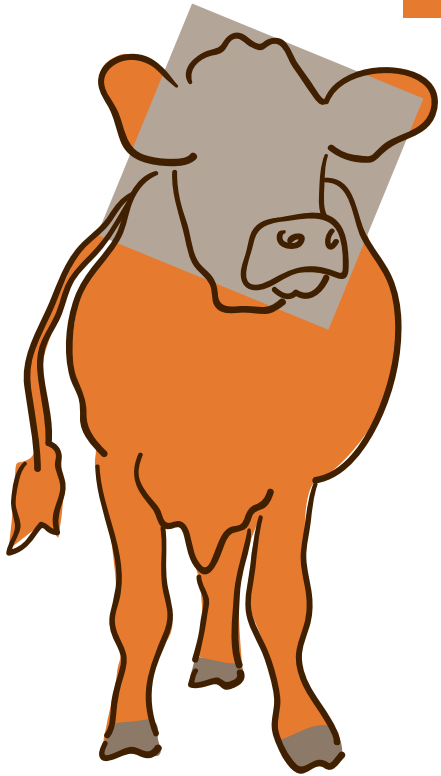
**Freedom to behave normally** by making sure animals have enough space, proper facilities and the company of other animals of their own kind.

5

**Freedom from fear and distress** by making sure their conditions and treatment avoid mental suffering.



# COW



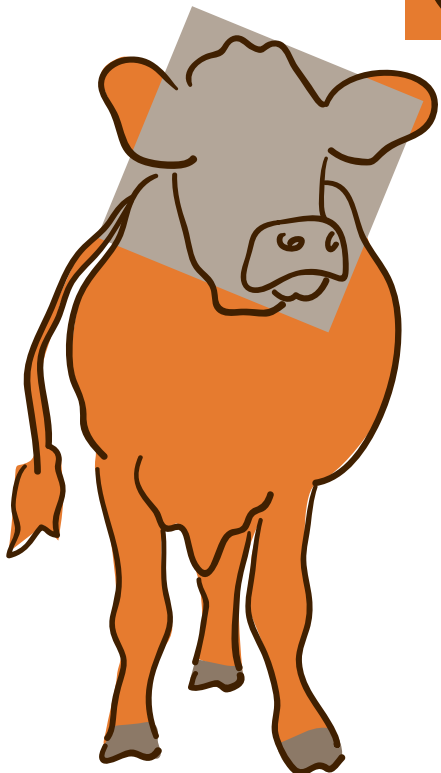
When a mother cow is separated from her calf, she will call to her child for days.

## Need

To have company of family members

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# COW

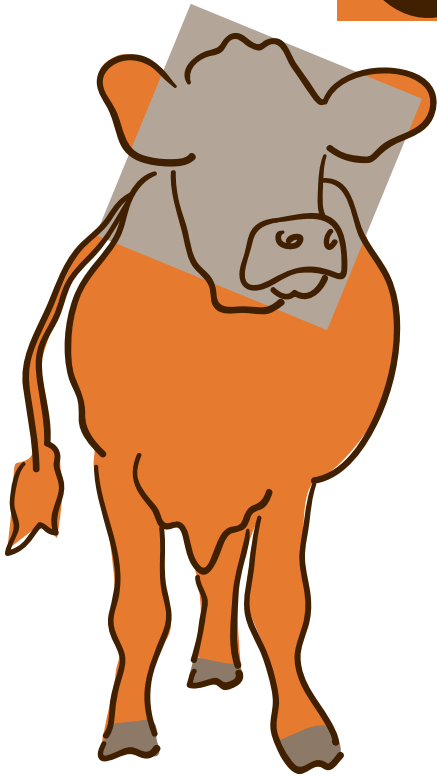


We like to lie down 40%-50% of each day. The rest of the time, you'll find us standing.

## Need

Freedom of mobility

# COW



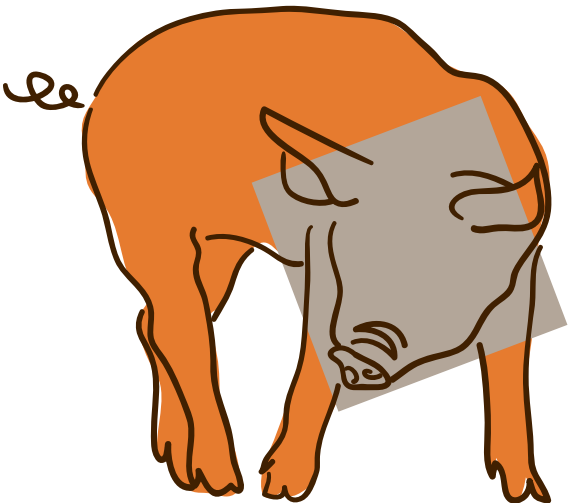
We feel frustrated, as evidenced by our rolling of our tongues and shaking our heads, when we can see and smell grass, but can't get to it.

## Need

Freedom from hunger

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# PIG

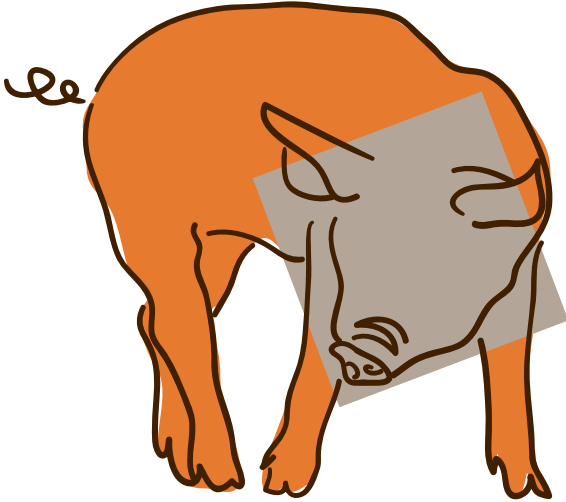


We do not like to use the bathroom near our living and eating areas! We're really clean animals!

## Need

To behave normally

# P I G

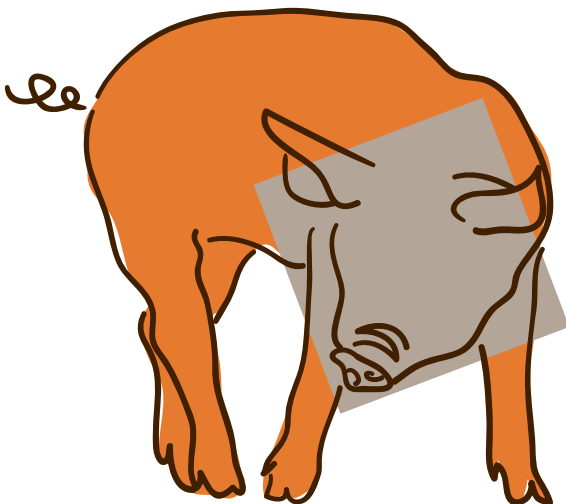


We really like to be with our friends and family members. We even sleep together in a “nest” when we can.

**Need**  
For companionship

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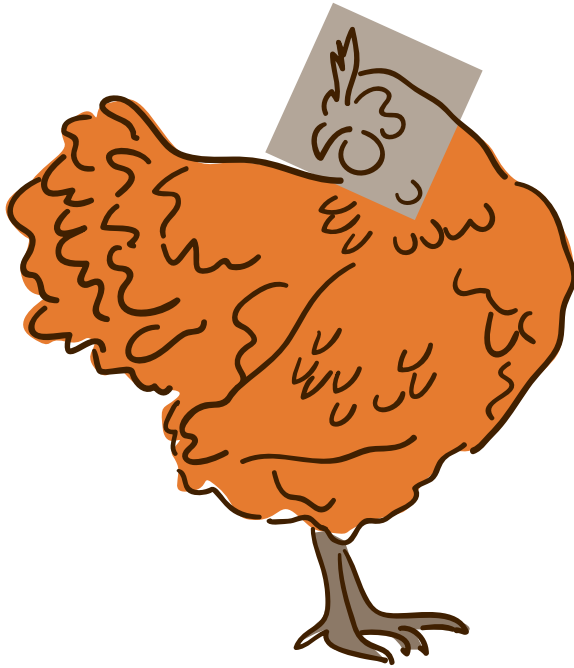
# P I G



Water is the most important part of our diet.

**Need**  
Freedom from thirst

# CHICKEN



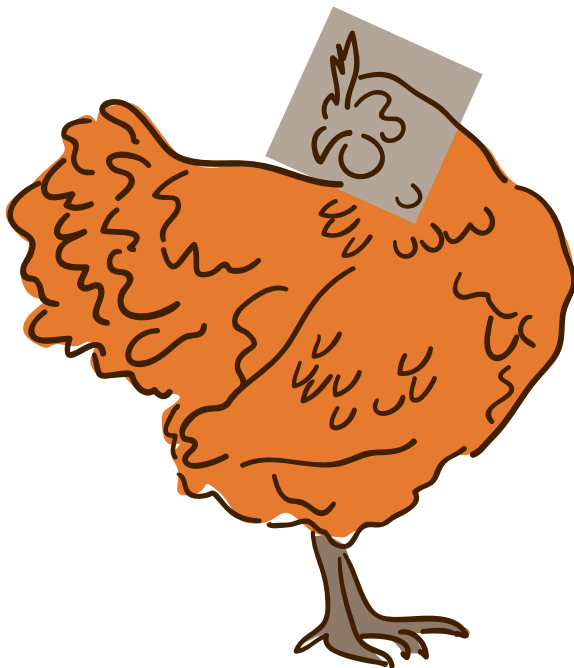
We like to use our sensitive beaks for exploring our surroundings, picking up items, feeding, and more.

## Need

To do our thing

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# CHICKEN

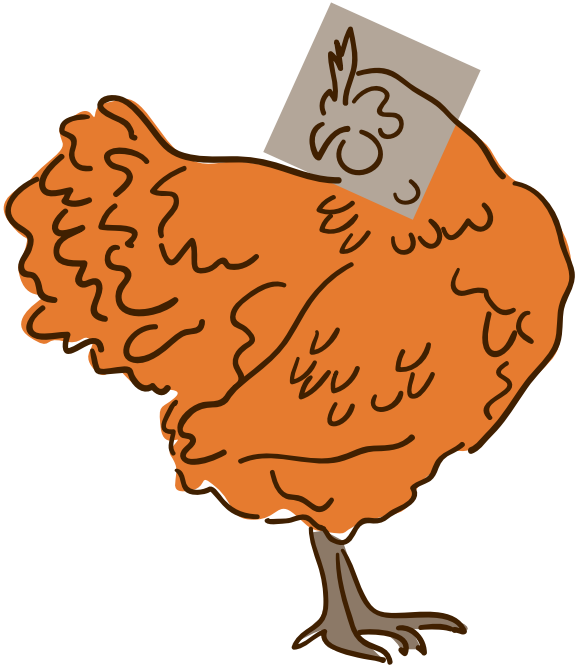


We have a particular way in which we like to build our nest.

## Need

Freedom from distress

# CHICKEN



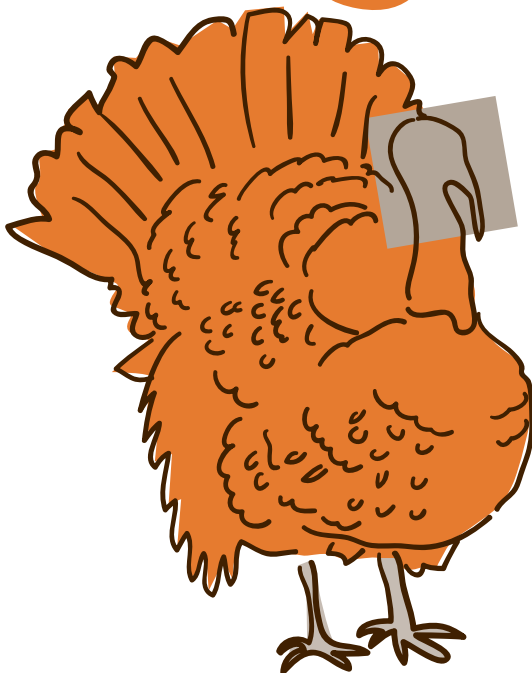
We like to take dust baths every couple of days, but we can't if we're in cages.

## Need

To behave normally

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# TURKEY

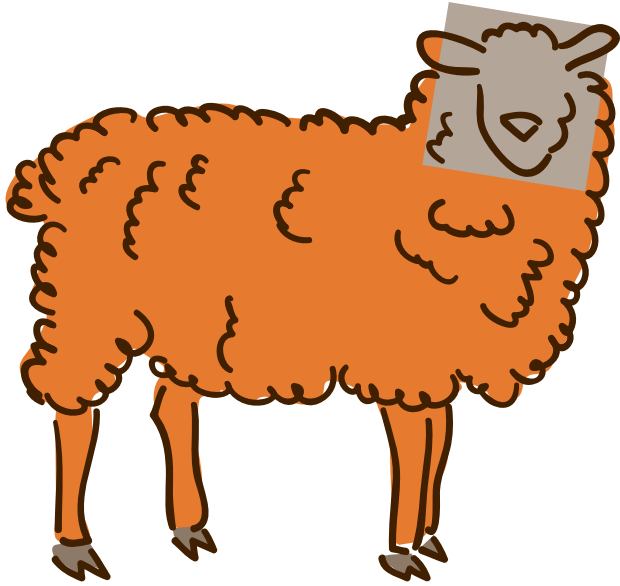


We like to forage for seeds, berries, beetles and other things. At night we like to roost in a low branch of a tree.

## Need

To be free to behave normally

# S H E E P

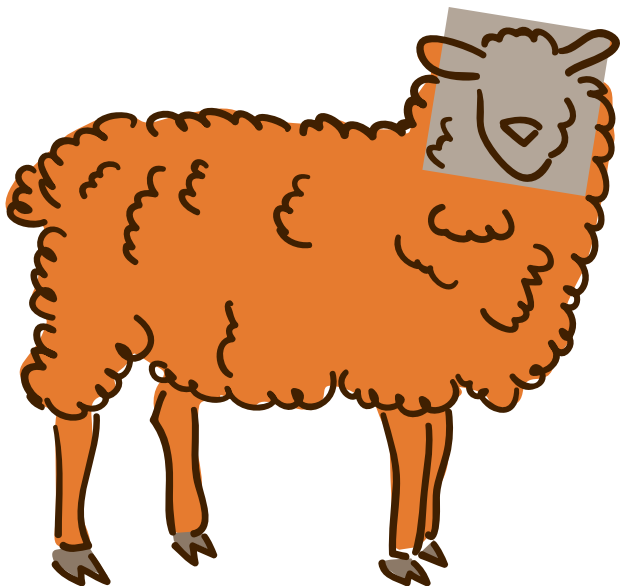


We become more fearful when we are separated from our group.

**Need**  
freedom from fear and distress

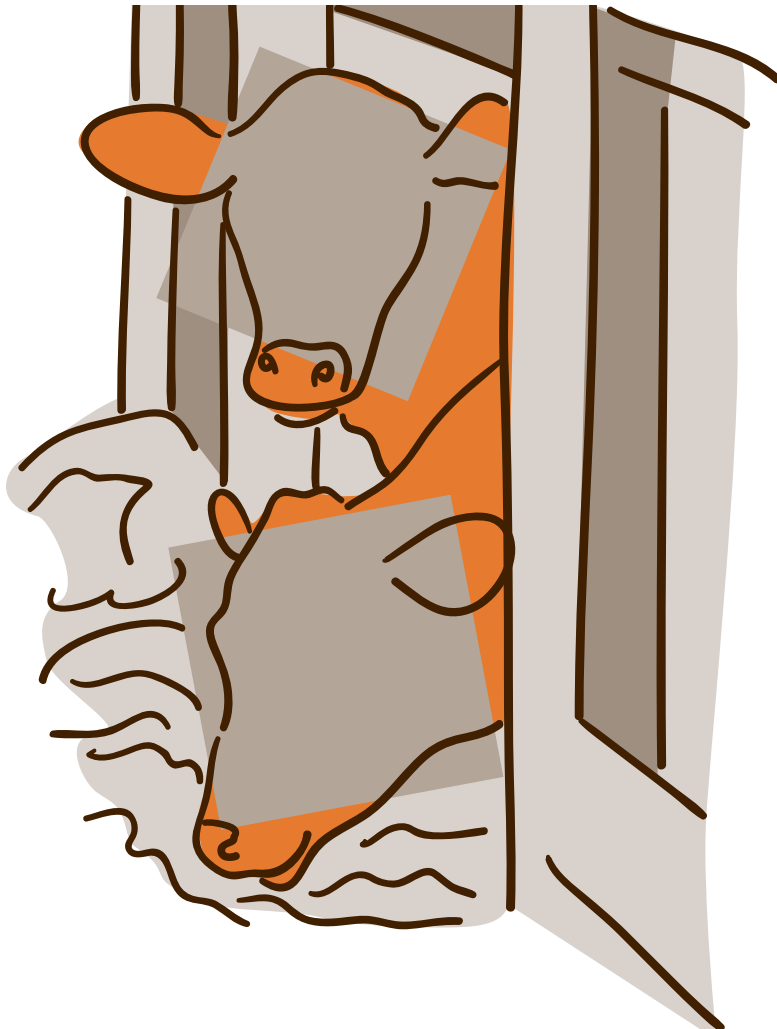
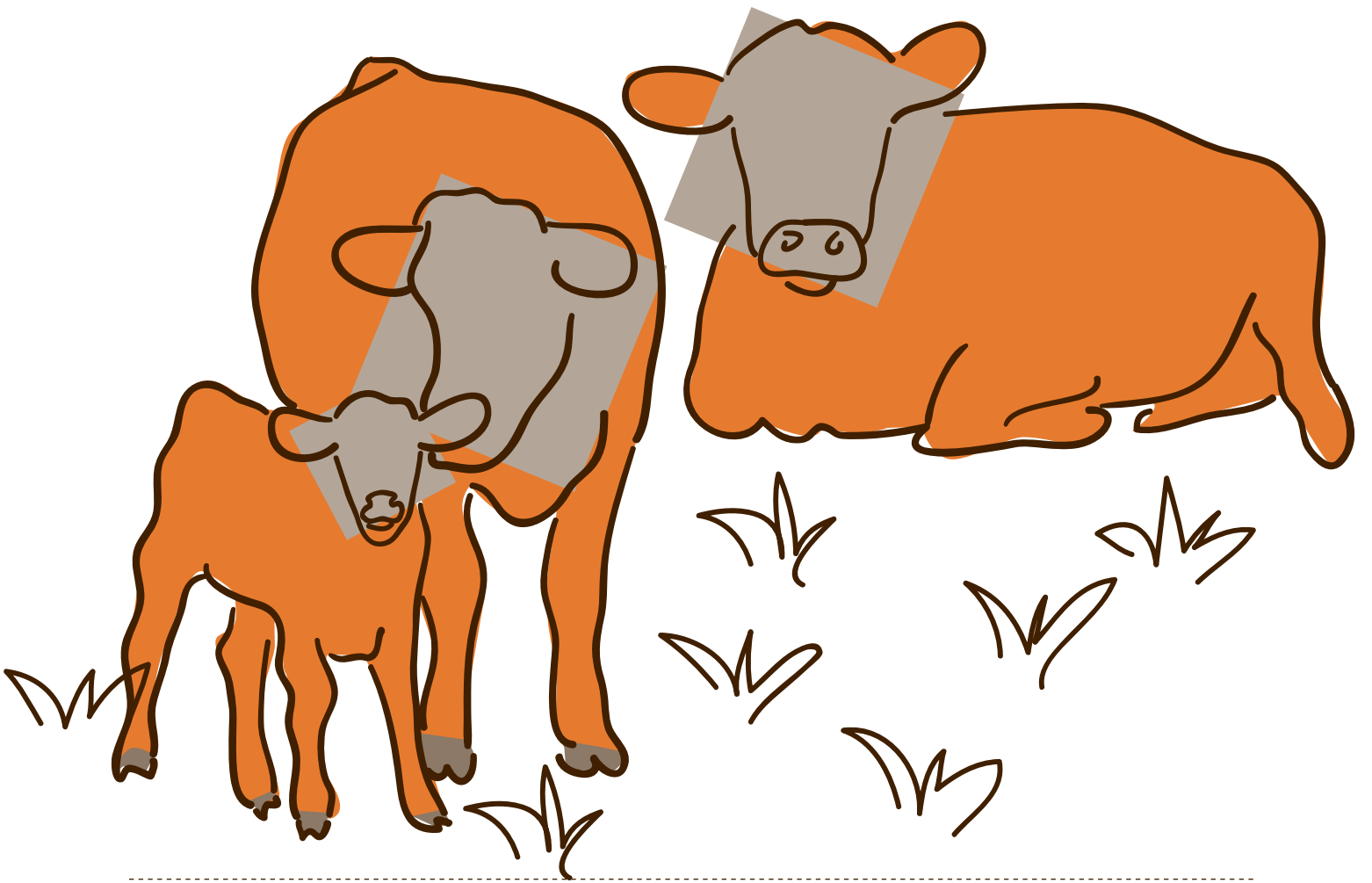
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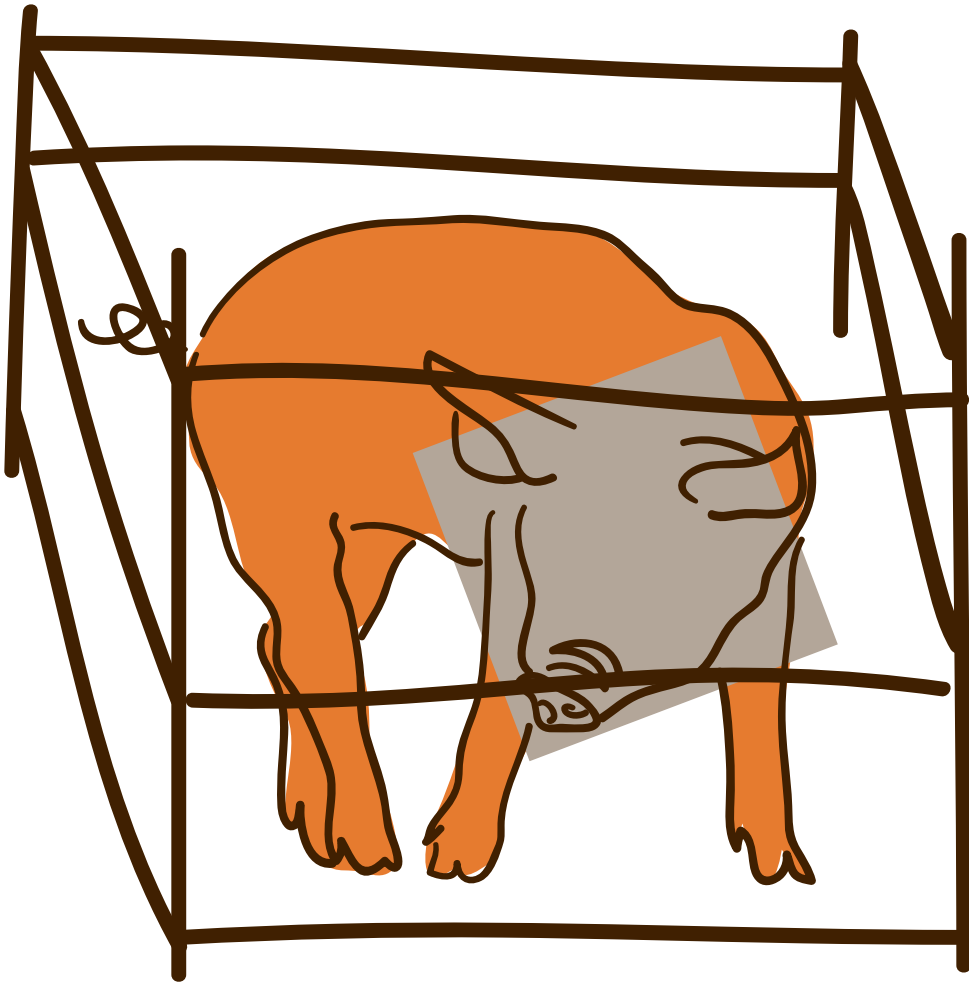
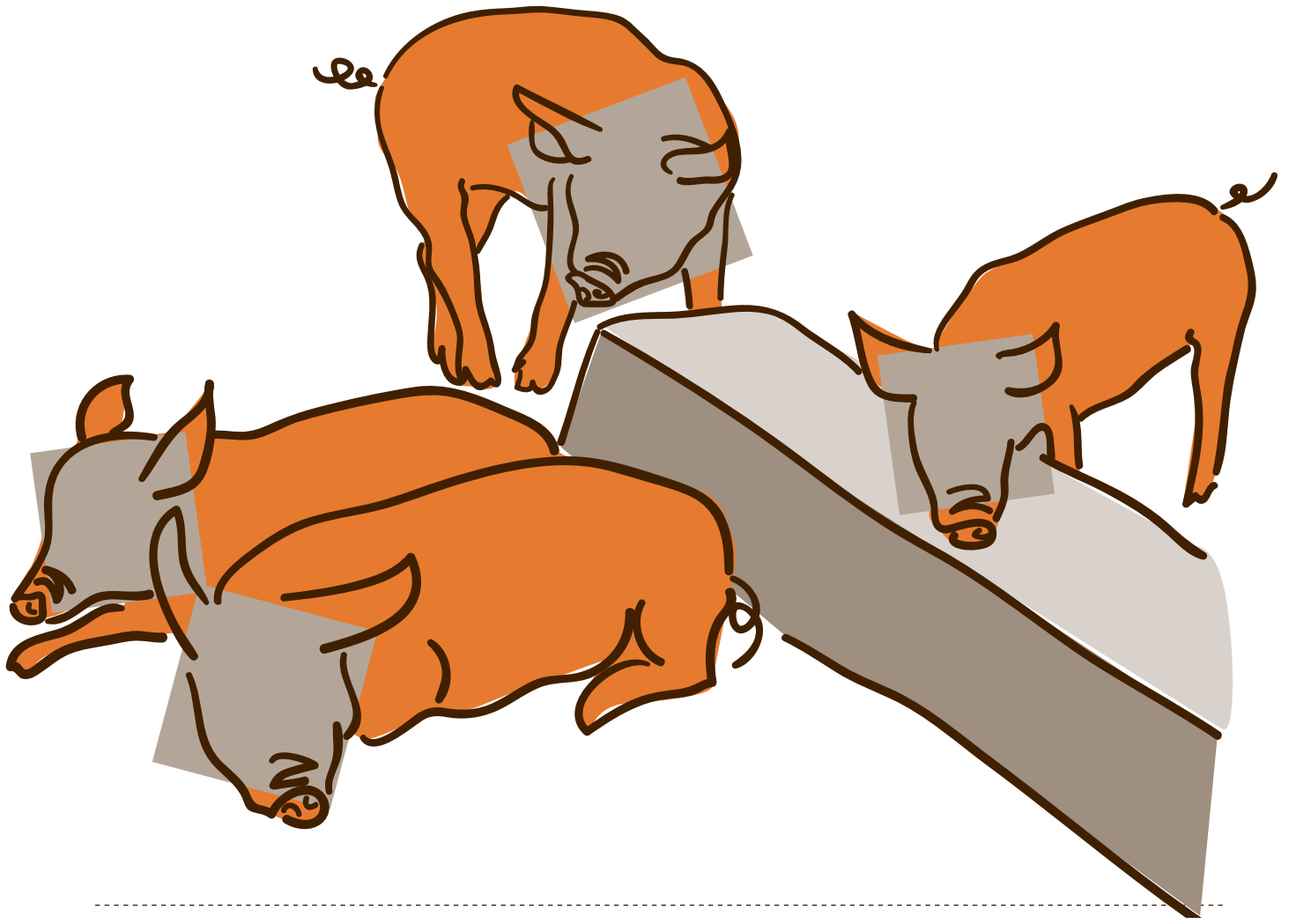
# S H E E P



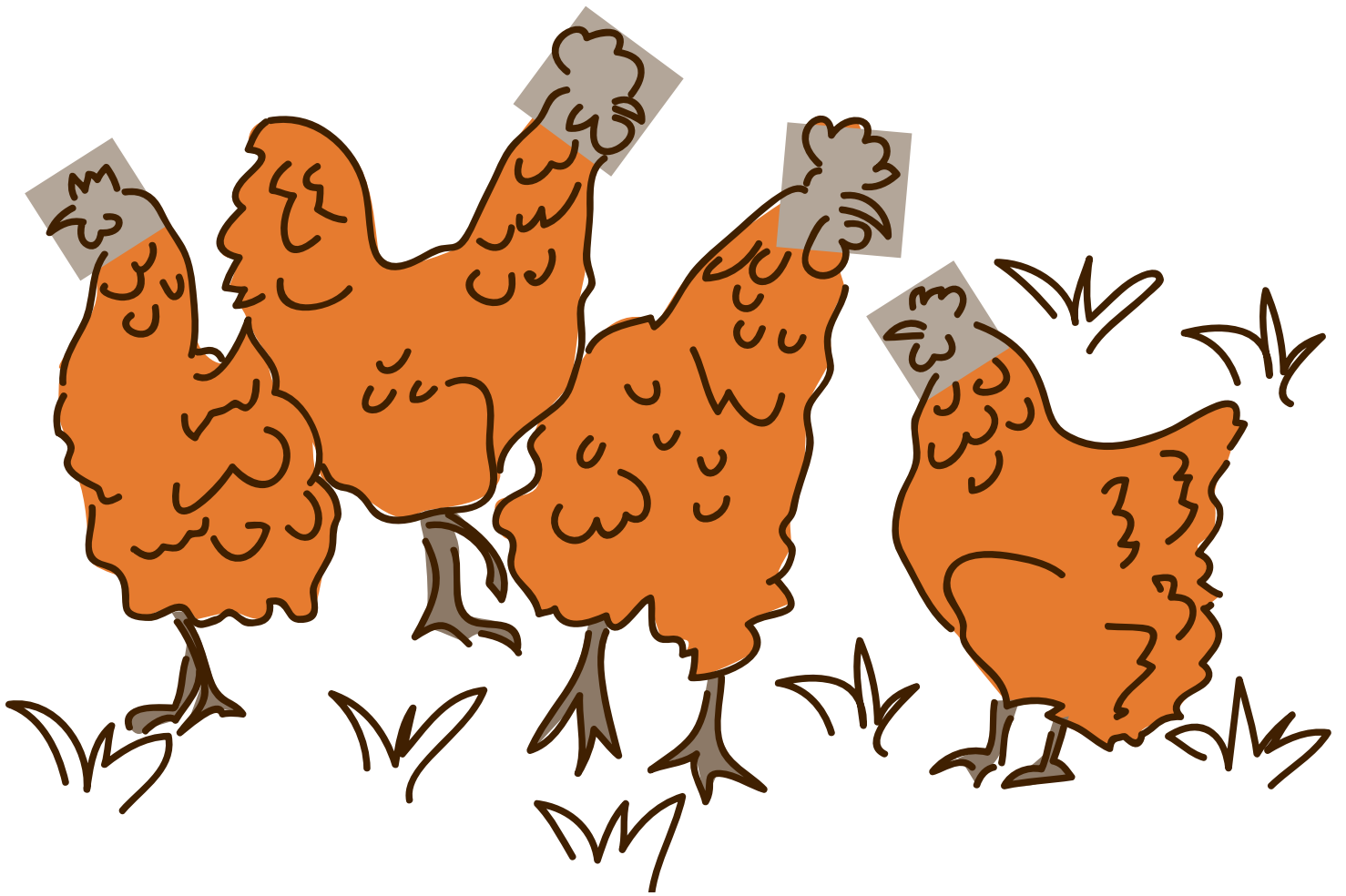
Our young lambs love to play chase and romp together in fields.

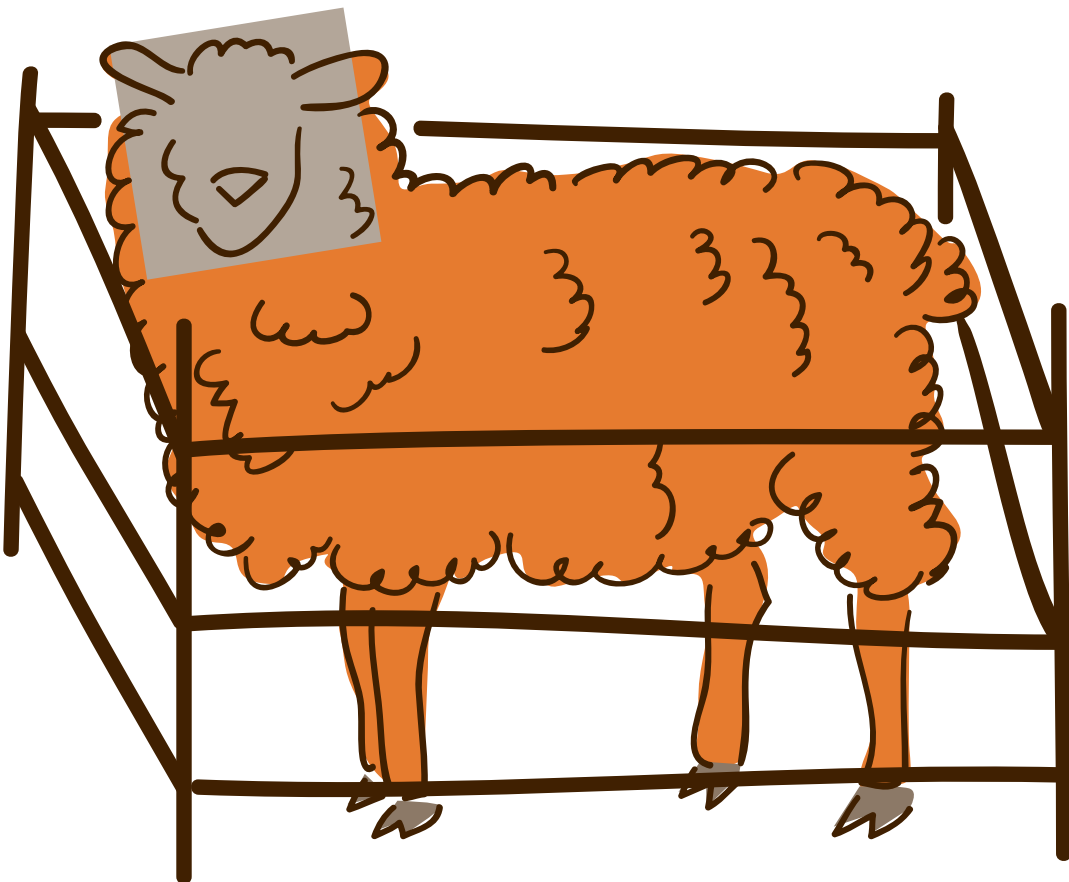
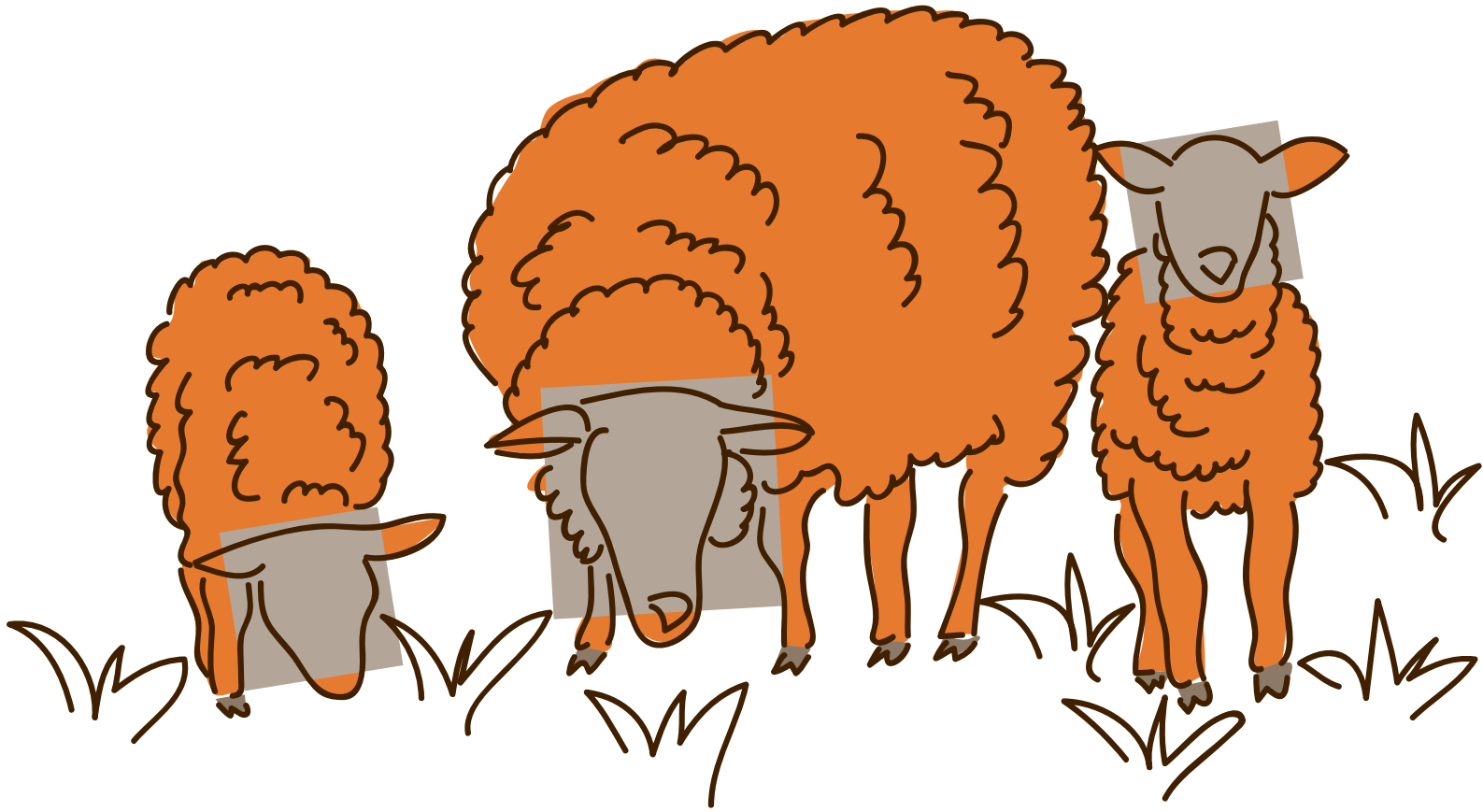
**Need**  
To engage in normal behavior

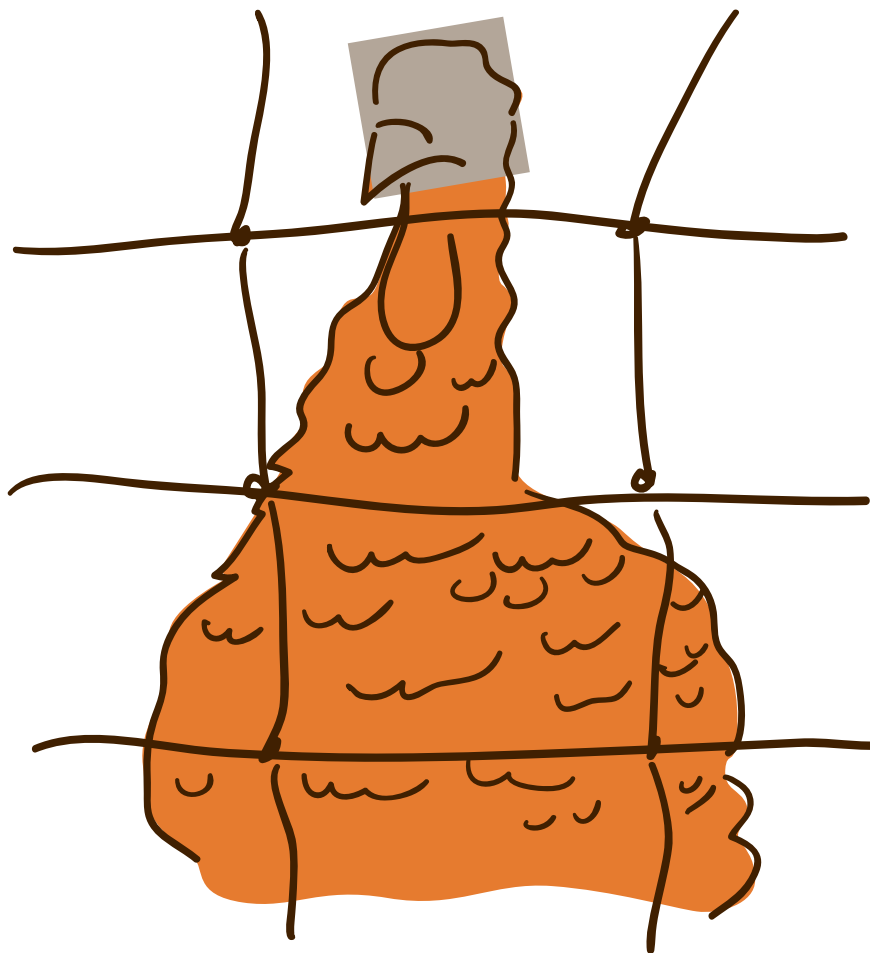
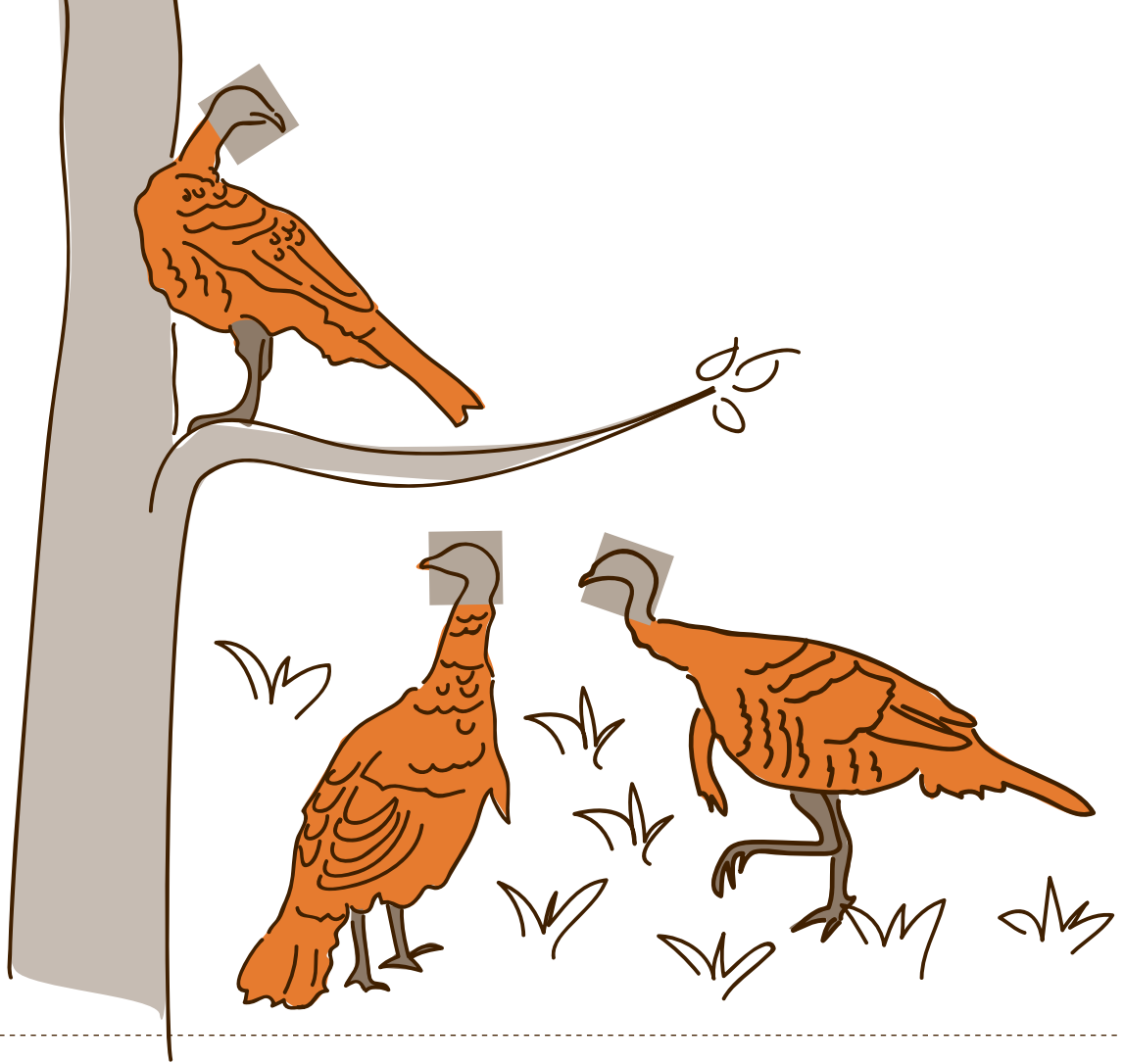














# Provide for All People

*Suggested ages: Lower and Upper Elementary age*

*Time needed: 45-60 minutes*

## Teacher Reflection and Subject Background

*Scripture: John 6:1-14*

*Ruth 1 and 2 Deuteronomy 24:14*

**O**n a beautiful hand-made communion table in a church in the mountains of Western North Carolina is a question that is central to the Christian faith, “Has Everyone Been Fed?” Has *Everyone* Been Fed? Just as Jesus instructed his disciples to take what they had and feed all who were present in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-14), so also are we called to provide food for all people. It is, on the one hand, a very difficult task tied to complex issues of poverty, politics, and power. Yet, on the other hand, it is really quite simple—take only what you need and share the rest. If all people lived by this precept, there would be far fewer hungry people in the world.

In order for us to live out the call of Christ and ensure that all are fed, we must approach our food systems with new determination to bring about change so that we are careful not to perpetuate the suffering of the hungry. Critical evaluation of the ways in which we produce, transport, market and consume food is essential for establishing a new vision of a world where everyone is fed. It is evaluation that sheds light on the connections between money, power, and hunger. It is evaluation that frees us from the imprisonment of a mind-set of scarcity where “us against them” and “somebody wins/somebody loses” are the rules. It is evaluation that if anchored in courage will lead us into the liberating mind-set of sufficiency where “us *and* them” is the reality. The passage in John speaks about “being satisfied.” With a mind-set of sufficiency, all can be fed to the point of satisfaction.

In our culture where the pursuit of more is heralded as the natural way, living with an attitude of sufficiency is seemingly impossible. The myth of scarcity reigns as we attempt to figure out how to share something we believe there isn’t enough of while making certain that

we aren’t the ones who are going without. When we operate from the assumption that there isn’t enough to go around, we cling tightly to the bottom line of profit and leave little room for experiencing the abundance illustrated in Jesus’ miracle—the kind of joyful abundance that results from an attitude of sufficiency. The trouble is we’ve forgotten how to be satisfied.

So, if we are to be faithful to the call of Jesus to care for the poor, the oppressed, the widowed, and orphaned and to feed the hungry, we must learn the lessons of sufficiency. Our actions to share what we have with others become only short-term band-aids if we have not learned how to be satisfied ourselves. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is not that Jesus multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish to feed the crowd; the text does not say the bread and fish were multiplied. Rather the miracle in this story is that the five loaves and two fish were enough! When we—and that is all of us—learn to be satisfied with what we have and to joyfully share it, then our efforts to provide food for all people will be far more sustainable.

How do we, then, learn and live out this lesson? As individuals? As communities? As corporations? As countries? How do we joyfully live with less than we think we need so that others can simply live? Individuals and families can do this easier than larger entities; but all groups of whatever size can work toward this goal. Companies that produce food, for example, can pay their workers fair wages. Communities can form commitments to buy foods and services from local providers. Wealthy countries can assist those in need without expecting repayment. The gifts of sharing can be gifts—no strings attached. When we generously and lovingly share even the best of what we have, however, the hungry will be satisfied and so will we. And that is the miracle.



## Summary of Lesson

**Discover:** Using the story of the feeding of the 5,000, encourage reflection on the notion that there is enough.

**Study:** Use a couple of group exercises to explore the concepts of fairness and justice as they relate to our food practices.

**Apply:** Learn the power of sharing and faith.

**Materials Needed:** Bibles, 6 apples, paring knife, large sheet of paper or poster board, marker, *People with Power* pages (cut into cards), copies of the *Act out of Faith* page.

## Opening Prayer

*O God, there is hunger in Your world and the pangs cut deep. Help us, God, to hear the cries of suffering from our brothers and sisters and our Mother Earth. And may these cries cut us so deep that we might respond with courageous conviction to share the abundance that comes from You. Amen.*

### Discover 20 minutes

Introduce the issue of hunger in our world. Talk with the kids about what they know of the causes of hunger, and the places in the world that have the most hungry people. Explain that all countries have hungry people. Discuss how most of the time, people who are hungry are those with little education, little money, and no land. Many times they are women, children, or people who are physically or mentally disabled. Ponder with the group about whether there is enough food in the world to feed everyone. Ask the group to listen to a

story from the Bible about feeding a lot of hungry people. Read John 6:1-14. Point out that this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels, and reflect on the significance of that fact. Read it again, slowly and meditatively. Ask the children to “chew” on this passage as they walk the labyrinth. What aspects of this story jump out at them? Encourage them to step into the roles of the various people in the story as they walk. They might imagine themselves as part of the hungry crowd and what it would feel like to have their hunger satisfied. Or perhaps they feel the doubt and disbelief that the disciples may have felt when told by Jesus that they should feed that hungry crowd. Can they imagine themselves as the little boy with seemingly not much to offer, or how about Jesus who knew what could be and who trusted in things not yet seen? Allow time for them to prayerfully walk.

### Study 20 minutes

Divide the group into five smaller groups (3 groups have 4 people each, 1 group has 3 people and 1 group has 1 person. Note: modify these groups sizes as needed, keeping the same proportions). Cut six apples into 8 slices each and distribute between the groups in the following amounts: 1 group of 4 has none, 1 group of 4 has 4 slices, 1 group of 4 has 8 slices, the group of 3 has 15 slices and the group of one person has 17. Talk with the children about this division of resources. Do they feel it is fair? Explain that it reflects the distribution of food globally. Ask them to imagine this scene worldwide. Who has the most food? Who has the least? Now, ask them to imagine a world where all people have enough food to eat. Within the context of this apple exercise, ask them to suggest a distribution that is more fair. Compare both scenarios with the one in the Bible. Are either of these apple distributions similar to the way Jesus fed 5,000 people? We don't really know how the food was divided, only that everyone had “as much as they wanted” and were “satisfied.” Jesus knew that what they had was enough.

Current statistics tell us that there is enough food in the world for everyone, yet hunger is still present.



Is it possible to redistribute what we have in a more just manner? What prevents us from doing so within the world context? Ask the students to share with the group their ideas, beliefs, and understandings. Be sure to dialogue with the group about the factors of greed and power for determining the distribution of food. Those who are in positions of power are often the ones who make decisions for the hungry people of the world. With the group, create a visible list of all the people and groups in power that they can name (e.g., government officials, the President, business owners, school administration, United Nations, church ministers, teachers, parents, themselves, etc.). Ask them to reflect on the influence each of these people or groups has on helping to end world hunger. Tell them that today, working in their groups, they will play the part of someone in power with relation to food production or distribution. (Leave the groups divided as they are for the apple exercise, or rearrange so that they are equal in number.)

Cut out the positions from the People with Power page. Hand out one card to each group. Give them several minutes to collaborate on a decision and then have each group present their decision to the whole group. Ask them to reflect on how the scripture passage(s) relates to their issue and decision. Let them discuss this as individual groups, and then report back to the larger group.

### **Apply** 15 minutes

Have the group sit in a circle. Reiterate that solving the worldwide issue of hunger can be quite complex and can involve lawmakers, company owners, food producers, and various countries. Ask the group to remember Jesus' solution for feeding the hungry people? Tell them that just as Jesus shared with the people what he had, we will share today what we have. Pass out the apple slices, asking the children to hold them and not eat them for a moment. Invite the students to close their eyes and imagine the tree that grew these apples, silently thanking the tree for its good work. Then ask them to imagine the land and soil from which the tree grew. Again, let them silently say thank you for its work. Ask them to imagine the person or people who picked these

apples. Say thank you to them silently for their good work. Now encourage the group to imagine standing near Jesus with thousands of other people and feeling hungry. These apple slices are all that they are given. Is it sufficient? Will they be satisfied?

As the children are eating, reflect with them about the power they have to help feed everyone. It is easy to let others worry about these issues, but feeding the hungry is a call to us all. Pass out "Act out of Faith" page to each person. Allow time for them to work on this page. Invite individuals to share their work with the group.

## **Conclusion**

As Christians, we are called to respond faithfully to the cries of the hungry. Not just policy makers and food producers, but us. Each one of us. May our response to that call begin with us learning how to be satisfied with only what we need. May it also involve joyfully sharing the abundance in our lives, working to improve food supplies and educating ourselves and others about the interrelatedness of hunger and our food production.

## **Closing Prayer**

*God, from your bountiful earth  
we can be fed.  
But not all of us are. This is our  
work, then—to make sure  
everyone is fed.  
But we need your help, O God,  
because sometimes we, like  
Jesus' disciples, lack the  
discipline, the courage, the  
know-how, the faith to care for  
all your children as much as we  
care for ourselves.  
By your mercy, show us the way.  
Amen.*

# act out of



Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. *Hebrews 11:1*

We know that there are hungry people in the world, but if we believe that everyone can be fed and no one needs to be hungry—if that is what we hope for, then let us have faith and act out of that faith. Choose one of the following ideas of ways you can take action (or come up with your own). Illustrate this idea or write a poem about it in the space below.

- Plant home, community, church and school gardens
- Support local farmers; buy locally grown foods
- Volunteer to work in a food bank or a soup kitchen
- Know who in the community is working to fight hunger, listen to them, and share ideas with them
- Buy fair trade products
- Compost
- Have a hunger awareness birthday party

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# PEOPLE WITH POWER

**Position:** World Bank leaders

**Issue:** World Bank gives loans to countries so they can produce food. Should you cancel all debt owed by poor countries as the Jubilee debt coalition asserts?

**Scripture:** *Leviticus 25: 8-17 Deuteronomy 15:1-11*

**Factors to consider:**

1. The World Bank has loaned billions of aid dollars to countries; with debt cancellation they would not get this money back.
  2. There is some concern that if the debts are cancelled, poor countries will mismanage their money and will not use it to reduce poverty and hunger.
  3. Aid in the form of financial loans often result in the poor countries owing more money in interest and principal than they can pay. They become dependent on this aid, and cannot become self-sufficient; they never obtain adequate purchasing power for things like food.
- 

# PEOPLE WITH POWER

**Position:** President of the United States

**Issue:** Should you use money allocated for development assistance programs to fund development of genetically modified foods in developing countries.

**Scripture:** *Micah 6:8 Proverbs 12:11*

**Factors to consider:**

1. Genetically modified foods are food that has had its genetic makeup altered. They can be made to resist pesticides and rot; in this way some believe they could help eradicate the problem of worldwide hunger.
2. Genetically modified foods are relatively new. We do not yet know the effects they may have on people's health and on the environment.
3. What programs are not being funded because money is being filtered to genetically modified food development?

# PEOPLE WITH POWER

**Position:** U.S. Lawmaker

**Issue:** You have solicited input from the small farmers in the state you represent and you know that they struggle to make a living. Meanwhile, the owners of a big food company are willing to give you financial support to represent their interests. How will you shape the U.S. food and agriculture policy?

**Scripture:** *Proverbs 31:8-9* *Leviticus 25: 1-7*  
*Matthew 25: 34-40*

**Factors to consider:**

1. U.S. Farm Policy that is set by people who have little understanding of farming often benefits wealthy people and corporations instead of small farmers, local communities and the environment.
  2. Lawmakers cannot please everyone.
- 

# PEOPLE WITH POWER

**Position:** President of a food production company

**Issue:** Your employees are asking for a fair wage, one that they could actually live on. Will you agree to pay it or will you hire others who are willing to provide cheap labor?

**Scripture:** *Deuteronomy 24:14* *Luke 12:34*

**Factors to consider:**

1. The less you have to pay your workers, the more money you make.
2. If the minimum wage is \$5.50, even if a person works 50 hours a week, they will only make \$13,000 per year.

# PEOPLE WITH POWER

**Position:** Grocery Store Manager

**Issue:** Several customers have asked that you begin to carry more fair trade items, such as coffee, tea, sugar, and bananas. Do you honor their requests or not?

**Scripture:** *Proverbs 14:31 Matthew 5:6 and 10*

**Factors to consider:**

1. Fair trade imported goods are often more expensive to buy, meaning that the store would make less money off the sale of these items.
  2. Fair trade items are those items that are produced in an environmentally friendly way and for which are bought from farmers for a fair price.
-