Mother Nature is full of good ideas for helping all kinds of plants and animals survive and grow. Sometimes, these species’ adaptive qualities and survival techniques are so innovative that we can’t help but think, “Good idea, Mother Nature!” Share these books and activities with your students, and they will be echoing that sentiment for a long time to come.

Tail Trouble

Read Aloud
What Do You Do With a Tail Like This? by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page (Houghton Mifflin, 2003). This beautiful book is full of information about various animals’ unique body parts, and what the parts are used for. Let the children try to guess the animals in the book when only a part of their bodies are shown.

Felt Board Story Game: Tail Trouble!
(Note: Use patterns on page 5 to make the animals and tails featured in this story. Cut them out and trace them onto felt, and then cut the felt animals and tails out. Use them as you tell the story below.)

Tail Trouble!
Today there is tail trouble in the animal world! There is a tail mix-up!

When the animals woke up this morning they all had lost their tails! It didn’t take long for them to find them… all mixed up together in a big pile.

“Oh, no!” the animals cried. “Our tails are all mixed up. Whose tail is whose? Won’t someone help us? Will you please help us?”

This is Dog. (Show Dog.) He had a long furry tail that he liked to wag to show he was happy. Dog needs his tail! Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Dog.)

This is Horse. (Show Horse) He had a tail of long hairs that were perfect for swishing away the flies on a hot summer day. Horse needs his tail! Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Horse.)

This is Cat. (Show Cat.) She had a long, thin tail that helped her keep her balance when she walked along a narrow fence or wall. Cat needs her tail! Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Cat.)

This is Peacock. (Show Peacock.) His tale was a colorful fan of feathers that was perfect for making the female peahens think he was handsome. Peacock needs his tail! Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Peacock.)
This is Monkey. (Show Monkey.) He had a long, thin tail that was perfect for curling around trees. Monkey needs his tail! Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Monkey.)

This is Lizard. (Show Lizard.) He had a long, pointy tail. If a predator caught him by the tail, it would break off and Lizard could escape. Then he would grow a new tail. Lizard needs his tail. Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Lizard.)

This is Fish. (Show Fish.) He had a flat tail that was perfect for propelling him through the water. Fish needs his tail! Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Fish.)

This is squirrel. (Show Squirrel.) Squirrel had a long, furry tail to wrap around himself like a blanket when it was cold. Squirrel needs his tail! Can you find it? (Choose a child to come up and place the correct tail on Squirrel.)

Each animal’s tail is different. The animals need their own, special tails to survive. Thank you for helping the animals find their tails!

Icy Adaptation

Read Aloud
The Mixed-up Chameleon by Eric Carle (HarperCollins, 1988). Individual animal species have unique characteristics that are key to survival. When the chameleon tries taking on characteristics from other animals, he finds he was happiest just being himself!

Nature Experiment
The chameleon thought he wanted to be a big, strong polar bear. The polar bear is able to swim in icy cold waters to hunt for food. Could the chameleon do that? Talk you’re your students about the thick layer of fat, called blubber, which enables polar bears and other artic animals to swim in the frigid waters. Then, try this experiment with them:

You Will Need
• Bowl of ice
• Four Ziploc sandwich-size bags
• Crisco

In Advance
• Turn one of the bags inside out. Place it inside a second bag with the ridge of the inner bag on the side of the indented edge of the outer bag. Zip the edges of the outer bag to the edges of the inner bag to make a double bag.
• Turn a second zip-to-close bag inside out and place it inside the last bag in the same way. Place Crisco between the two bags on both sides then zip the bags shut to seal the Crisco in between the bags.

Experiment!
Have students take turns slipping the empty bag on their hands, and placing their hands in the bowl of ice. This will feel very cold. Next, have them repeat the process with the Crisco-layered bag. The fat layer will help insulate the hand from the ice, just as the fat layer on a polar bear insulates it from the frigid waters. Good idea, Mother Nature!

Storytelling: Seed with a Secret

You will need the following props to tell this story:
• Baseball cap (for storyteller when acting as the Boy)
• Brown felt square (for “dirt”)
• A real tree branch with several felt leaves glued to it
• A yellow paper plate (for the sun)
• Several 30-inch pieces of silver or shiny blue packaging ribbon, knotted at the center (for water)
• Materials for one seed (see assembly directions and quantities on next page): brown craft foam, wiggle eyes, a small craft pom-pom, permanent marker, glue, green pipe cleaners, artificial flower, paper fastener
To make the seed:

1. Cut two ovals, about 8” x 6” from yellow or brown craft foam.

2. Staple or glue along three sides of the ovals (two widths and one length), so they adhere to one another and form a three-dimensional pouch. (Fill with a small amount of tissue to round out, if necessary)

3. Give the seed a face by gluing on wiggle eyes, a pom-pom nose, and a smile with permanent marker.

4. Slip or fasten the head of an artificial flower on the ends of two 12-inch green pipe cleaners twisted together.

5. Staple the bottom end of the flower into the bottom of the seed through one end. Fold the rest of the flower into the seed to hide it.

6. Close the seed at the top with a paper fastener.

7. Open the seed at the end of the story to show the seed’s secret: a flower!

**Seed with a Secret**

by Kathy Ross King

(Storyteller wears ball cap to play part of Boy. Place Seed at feet.)

A boy was out walking in the woods one day. He spotted a seed and picked it up. He looked at it for a minute turning it this way and that, and then, he tossed it back on the ground.

As he started to walk away, the boy heard the seed call to him. “Wait! Wait!” cried the seed.

The boy turned around and again picked up the seed. “What do you want?” he asked.

“I have something to tell you,” said the seed. “I have a secret.”

“Well, what is it?” asked the boy, a little impatiently. “What is your secret?”

“I can’t tell you yet,” said the seed. “First you must dig a little hole in the dirt, put me in it and cover me up.”

The boy did as he was told, and buried the seed in the ground. (Place felt square over seed.)

“Now will you tell me your secret?” whispered the boy, with his mouth down very close to the dirt.

“No,” answered the seed. “Not yet. Now you must move the branches above me to the side, so that the sun shines down on me.”

The boy pushed back the branches so the warm sun beamed down on the place where the seed was planted. (Hold branch over seed, then move branch and hold sun over seed.)

“Now tell me your secret!” the boy pleaded.

“Not yet,” the seed said again. “I need you to pour water on me so I can have a drink.”

The boy used his hands to scoop water from a small creek and sprinkle it over the seed.
Craft

Kangaroo Pouch

You will need:
- Brown paper lunch bags
- Yarn
- Picture of kangaroo joey from page 16
- Scissors
- Hole punch
- Hole reinforcements

To make the Kangaroo:
- Have the children color and cut out the joey.
- Open the bag and fold the top edges of the bag over two times to make the pouch.
- Punch a hole on each side of the pouch. Cover each hole with a hole reinforcement.
- Cut a 3½-foot long piece of yarn. Tie an end through each hole.
- Place the baby in the bag pouch and hang the pouch around the neck so it hangs down in front like the pouch on a real kangaroo.
- Have the children take their joeys for a hop!

Kathy Ross King was a teacher and director for nursery school programs in Oneida, New York, for thirty years. She is the author of more than fifty craft books including the Holiday Crafts for Kids series and the Crafts for Kids Who are Wild About series. Her craft projects frequently appear in Highlights magazine.

Storytime

(Shake silver ribbon prop over seed to look like water.)

“Surely now you will tell me your secret?” asked the boy, hopefully.

“Come back next month and I will tell you for sure.” The seed promised.

The boy forgot about the seed for several weeks. But when he went out walking in the woods again, he remembered the seed's promise. He went to look for the seed. When he came to the place where he had planted the seed, he smiled. Now he knew what the seed's secret was!

Do you?

(Open seed and pull out flower)

Another good idea, Mother Nature!

Fingerplay: Kangaroo Times Two

by Kathy Ross King

(Open seed and pull out flower)

Another good idea, Mother Nature!

Jump, jump, jump (jump hand!),

Goes the mother kangaroo.

You might think she's alone,

But really, there are two!

She has a soft fur pocket (rub front of fist),

And if you peek inside (pretend to look into fist),

You'll find her baby kangaroo (pop finger up through fist)

Along for the ride!

Jump, jump, jump (jump hand with finger baby)!

Kangaroo keeps her baby joey safe in her pouch. What a good idea, Mother Nature!
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Cut out along dotted lines