The Soil Web

In this activity, students will build a web that connects everyday objects to the soil, learning that soils support many important products and services.

Set Up:
Print out a variety of pictures of everyday objects. Also have some blank sheets so students can make up their own objects. Tie a string to them so they can be worn as nametags (optional).
Print a picture of soil and set in the middle of the room or in the middle of the wall.
Print out pictures of intermediate products.
Cut lengths of ribbon or string (4-5 feet, one for each student) and affix one end to the picture of soil.

Notes:
The web can be built on the wall (requires tape) or in the middle of the floor
-Printing on cardstock or laminating lets you reuse the pictures for multiple groups
-If you have a small space, print out pictures on notecards rather than full sheets.

Introduce the activity
Ask: Have you thought about the soil today? Did you know that you’ve already relied on the soil in many ways this morning, without even knowing it?

The Soil Web
Step 1: A soil chain. Hand out the pictures of objects. You could pass them out randomly, or ask students to name an item they used this morning, and hand them the corresponding picture. Ask your students to think about how that object is derived from soil, and to draw a chain representing this relationship. Provide an example if they need inspiration:
T-shirt → Fibers/Textiles → Crops (cotton) → Soil
Some objects may have more than one link to the soil. For example, furniture requires both lumber and fiber. If the students identify both, great. If not, that’s OK, they can just focus on one linkage. Have students work in small groups to share their chains with each other and discuss.

Step 2. Create the soil web. Have students attach one end of the yarn to the soil picture, and hold the other with their object. Have them identify intermediates in their soil chain and clip them to the yarn. Note that multiple objects will share the same intermediate steps, so students will have to work together to build this web.

Variation: Print mini versions of the objects, attach to magnets and arrange on a magnetic black/white board. Draw the links between on the objects.

Generalize & Apply
Ask your students to take the perspective of various professions, and think about why soil is important from their perspective.

Adapted from:
The Soil Chain. Utah State University Cooperative Extension. https://utah.agclassroom.org/

Adapted by: Jennifer DeBruyn