

Dear Family Member,

Welcome to our first unit of study, “Animal Adaptations.”

This year, our third grade students will build literacy and language skills by participating in ten cross-disciplinary units of study in our Benchmark Advance Program. Each three-week unit will focus on one topic, and the topics will range from economics to earth science, history and culture to themes in literature, and more. As students read poems, stories, plays, and informational articles, they will strengthen their reading and writing skills. They’ll also participate in meaningful collaborative conversations, and they’ll make connections to other content areas.

As we start each unit, I will be sending home a letter like this one, introducing the focus of the unit and the skills your child will be learning. I will also provide suggested activities that you and your child can do together at home to build on the work we’re doing in class.

In this unit of study, “Animal Adaptations,” we’ll be learning what many different animals do in order to survive. Some animals have special features, like sharp teeth, feathers, or webbed feet, that help them; others behave in a way that gives them an advantage. Some use camouflage to blend into their surroundings and others, like the iguana, can puff themselves to look bigger and scare away predators in the process. We’ll be reading informational science texts, studying illustrations, and looking at graphs and diagrams. Along the way, we’ll meet animals like the red-eyed tree frog, hawk, Arctic fox and many, many others.

“Animal Adaptations” will introduce your child to many exciting concepts and ideas in life science, and I hope you’ll enjoy working together with your child on extension activities for the unit. Should you have any questions about our reading program or about your child’s progress, please don’t hesitate to contact me

“Animal Adaptations” is an interesting and informative unit to kick off our program, and I hope it will spark some lively discussions at home.

I look forward to working together as partners this year. Should you have any questions about our reading program or about your child’s progress, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Animal Adaptations

In this unit, we read about how animals survive, and we think in depth about the question “How do living things survive in their environment?” Here are some activities designed to continue the conversation about adaptations and to build on the skills and concepts your child has learned in school. Hopefully you’ll even have some fun, too, as you work together!

Topic Connection

Look Again!

Wherever you live, try to make it a point to observe the natural world with your child. Animals live in the city as well as in the country. Think about the pigeons and chipmunks, the squirrels, and even the cockroaches that you see. Ask your child how he or she thinks those animals survive. If you don’t know the answer, you can observe and research together!

Vocabulary Connection

More Verbs, Please

In this unit, students are learning new words including higher-level verbs such as **avoid**, **remain**, and **provides**.

You can support students’ word knowledge by discussing synonyms for these verbs that are part of their oral language (*stay away from*; *stay*; *gives*) and by using the higher-level verbs in meaningful contexts as you share everyday experiences, read newspapers and magazines, and view television or movies.

Comprehension Connection

Compare and Contrast

Scientists observe closely and then compare and contrast their findings. To help your child practice this skill, select two animals—or objects or events—to compare and contrast. Fill in a Venn diagram with the similarities and differences you see.

Word Study Connections

Oh, Oh, Oh!

In our phonics and word study instruction, students are reading many words with a long *o* sound. They’re learning that the same sound can be spelled differently, such as *o*, *ow*, *oa*, and *oe*. Here’s a game you can play to practice. Get sixteen index cards or cut-out pieces of paper. On four of the cards, write “o.” On the second four write “ow.” On the next four cards, write “oa,” and on the last four cards, write “oe.” Then shuffle the cards. Take turns picking a card from the deck. The first person to say a word that uses the letters on the card wins the card.