Dear Family Member,

Welcome to our first unit of study, "Plants and Animals in Their Habitats."

This year, our second 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 much more. As students read poems, stories, plays, and informational articles, they will strengthen their reading and writing skills and strategies, participate in meaningful collaborative conversations, and make connections to their other content area studies. And we look forward to sharing their progress with you!

As we start each unit, I will be sending home a letter like this one, introducing the unit focus and skills your child is 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 "Plants and Animals in Their Habitats," we will be learning about how living things survive. As we read different kinds of texts, both fiction and nonfiction, we'll be looking at habitats around the world. Your child will read about coral reefs, grasslands, and the tropics. In addition, your child will be introduced to animals and their habitats in animal fantasy stories.

In each case, we will be focusing on the essential question: How do living things get what they need to survive? It's a fascinating question that scientists have been exploring for ages, and I hope it will generate some interesting discussions at home as you and your child work on some of the following activities together.

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.

Plants and Animals in Their Habitats

Here are some activities designed to continue the conversation about how living things survive and to build on the skills and concepts your child is learning in school. Hopefully, you'll find these activities enjoyable and educational.

Topic Connection

See It Live!

It's not just in the wilderness that habitats can be found. A city park is a habitat and so is a suburban backyard. Wherever you live, find a habitat to explore with your child. Look at grass growing between the cracks in a sidewalk, a squirrel scurrying up a tree or even a spider building a web in an attic. Together with your child, talk about how a living thing gets what it needs to survive

Vocabulary Connection

Find that Word!

In school, students are learning these new higher-level vocabulary words: **advantage, allow, emperor, explore, feasting, handle, harshest, kinds, nature, searches, swayed,** and **thick.**

You can support your child's word knowledge by using these words in meaningful contexts as you share everyday experiences, read newspapers and magazines, and view television or movies.

Comprehension Connection

Just the Facts, Ma'am!

An important reading skill is being able to make note of the main idea and supporting details of a text. To reinforce this skill, read an article on the Internet or in a newspaper together with your child. Ask him or her to tell you what the article is about. Can your child relate two or more details or facts from the story?

Phonics Connections

A-OKAY in a Couple of Ways

In our phonics instruction, students are reading words that have the *long a* sound, including constructions that have vowel teams: *ai, ay,* and *ea*. To help your child gain fluency reading this letter and letter combinations, try the following activity. See how many words with a long "a" sound you can come up with by brainstorming together. Look around the house, open up a book. If you can find more than ten, each of you gets an "A"! (Below is a list of some words from the unit to help you get started.)

wait, away, break, gave