

Lesson 2: Hierarchy of Being

PURPOSE

To understand the special place human persons have in the world.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the powers humans share with animals and other living beings.
2. Understand the concept of hierarchy of being.
3. Understand that the powers to think and choose are uniquely human powers, distinct from animals and all other living beings.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Four Boxes Game
- Powers of Beings Table + Answer Key
- Examples of Hierarchies Handout

VOCABULARY

- Power: the ability of a living being to do something on its own
- Power to think: the human ability to know and connect ideas
- Power to choose: the human ability to knowingly select between options
- Hierarchy: a system in which things are arranged above and below one another according to their importance or perfection

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Recall the purpose of the course and the main topics that will be covered.

Step 2: Play the **Four Boxes** ice breaker game. Place four open boxes with numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 labeled on them in the middle of the room. Explain that through this game, the students will give different preferences to things in their life. The teacher will read aloud from each list below e.g., “What is your favorite beverage?” and ask the students to write down their personal preference on a piece of paper out of the available options. The students will then “vote” by writing down their first-ranked response (e.g., hot chocolate) and placing it in box #1, their second-ranked response (e.g., “juice”) in box #2 and so forth. After each question, have a volunteer calculate the number of items in each box to determine which items are the most and least popular in the class. Below is the list to read aloud:

- Favorite beverage: juice, water, tea, hot chocolate
- Preferred sweets: cake, pie, candy, cookies
- Movie genre: comedy, horror, drama, action
- Music preference: pop, rock, hip-hop, classical
- Favorite ice cream: chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, caramel
- Chore I dislike the most: dishes, folding clothes, cleaning the bathroom, making my bed
- Most important thing in friendship: trust, having fun, saying nice things, sharing feelings
- Favorite way to spend a free day: playing video games, sleeping, reading, playing outside, spending time with friends
- It’s great when a classmate: helps others with studying, defends another student, tells great jokes, respects others

When the game ends, explain that this game shows how different students value different things. For some categories, such as favorite sweets or beverages, these are simply a matter of different tastes and no one choice is necessarily better than the other. However, in other categories, it is very important to order things correctly. For example, in friendship, trust is more important than simply having fun. While having fun is great and friends do have fun together, if trust is broken, the friendship, and the fun that came as a consequence of that, will disappear too.

Step 3: Write the definition of Power on the board:

Power: the ability of a living being to do something on its own

Non-living beings, like rocks or stones, do not have powers since they do not possess the ability to do anything on their own. Only living beings (plants, animals, and humans) possess certain powers. Some powers are shared by plants, animals, and humans alike, some are shared only by animals and humans, and certain powers belong to humans alone.

Non-living beings, plants, animals and humans form a hierarchy according to the complexity and perfection of the powers they possess. e.g. A rock does not possess the power to grow. Therefore, we do not evaluate the perfection of a rock according to whether it can grow. A rock is less complex than a human being.

Write the definition of Hierarchy on the board:

Hierarchy: a system in which things are arranged above and below one another according to their perfection of powers

Hand out the [Powers of Beings Table](#) to each student. Give students a few minutes to fill in the worksheet on their own.

Step 4: Ask the students to share their answers. Go through the responses together as a class, clarifying the answers. Explain that all living beings share three powers: the power to grow, to eat, and to reproduce.

There are three other powers that animals and humans share: the power to move from place to place, to use the senses, and to feel emotions. Animals and humans can feel, smell, touch, hear, and see things, whereas plants cannot. Animals and humans can feel emotions such as fear, pain or pleasure, which plants do not feel (for example, if one picks a flower, the flower does not feel pain).

Finally, humans alone have the power to think and choose. Plants and animals do not share these powers. Animals do have a basic form of understanding, for example, when a dog learns commands such as “sit”, “stay”, “go”. However, this basic form of understanding is not the same as the power to think. Humans alone can think about complex concepts, solve a math problem, create new inventions, or creatively communicate through art.

Highlight that the powers to think and to choose are specifically human powers. Write the following vocabulary definitions on the board:

Power to think: the human ability to know and connect ideas

Power to choose: the human ability to knowingly select between options

Highlight that the powers to think and choose distinguish humans from all other beings. This also means that human beings should develop these powers in the best way possible in order to live a fully human life. Explain that in this curriculum, the students will learn how to use these powers in an excellent way.

Step 5: Highlight that due to their unique powers, beings in the world form a hierarchy.

Ask the students if they can think of an example of some hierarchies in nature. Give students the [Examples of Hierarchies Handout](#) and lead the class through different examples of hierarchies. Explain that there are different hierarchies in nature, such as:

- **Food Chain Hierarchy** in which soil is decomposed and consumed by plants as primary producers; plants are then consumed by herbivores which feed on plants, which are in turn consumed by secondary consumers; which are finally consumed by top carnivores or tertiary consumers.
- **Sea Food Chain Hierarchy** where, at the bottom there are microscopic sea algae called phytoplankton, which are eaten by crustaceans such as crabs, lobsters or shrimps; crustaceans are in turn eaten by smaller fish called herring, which get eaten by a bigger type of fish called mackerel, which are finally eaten by the sharks who are on the top of the food chain.
- **Hierarchy of Being** in which all beings in the world form a hierarchy according to their perfection and powers. On the bottom there are non-living beings which have no powers, then there are plants with the powers to eat, grow and reproduce; above them are animals with powers to use senses and feel emotions, and on the top, there are humans with their unique powers to think and choose.

The hierarchy of being shows us that humans have a special place in the world, and in future lessons, the class will learn the implications this has for everyday life.

To review the Hierarchy of Being table, call out the different categories e.g., “animals” and have the students raise their hand or call out the powers that the category possesses: “the power to eat, grow, reproduce, move from place to place, use their senses and feel emotions!” Then, call out the different powers and have students identify the category: e.g. “the power to eat, the power to grow, the power to reproduce?” Answer: “plants!”

Step 6: Summarize. Recall the two powers that distinguish humans from all other beings: the power to think and the power to choose. Recall also the example of different hierarchies in the world and how different beings form a hierarchy of being according to their perfection and powers. Highlight that the powers to think and choose are those which distinguish humans from all other beings, and which enable human beings to pursue excellence.

POWERS OF BEINGS TABLE

Fill in the chart and mark an “x” in each category for every power that all living beings share, the powers that only animals and humans share, and the powers that only humans have.

POWERS	PLANTS	ANIMALS	HUMANS
Eat			
Grow			
Reproduce			
Move from place to place			
Use the senses			
Feel emotions			
Think			
Choose			

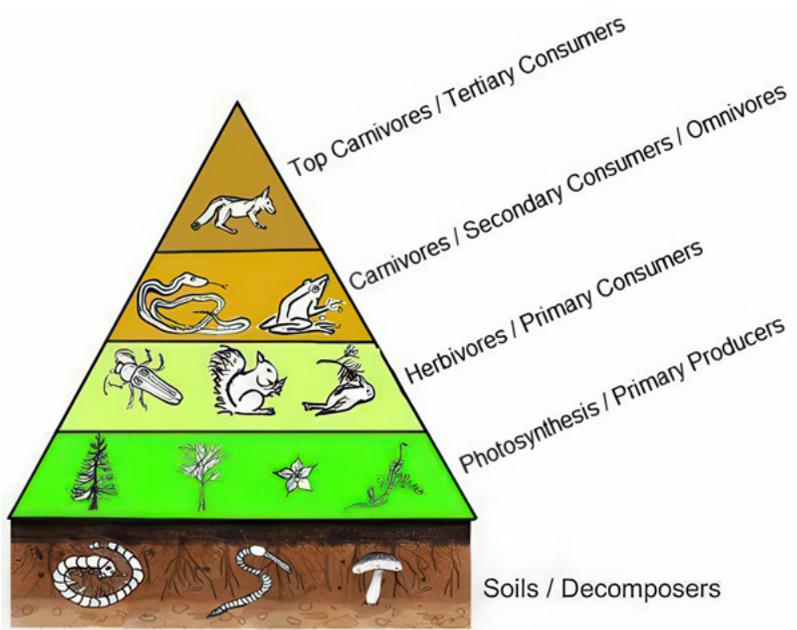
Powers of Beings Table - Answer Key

The correctly filled table should look like the one below.

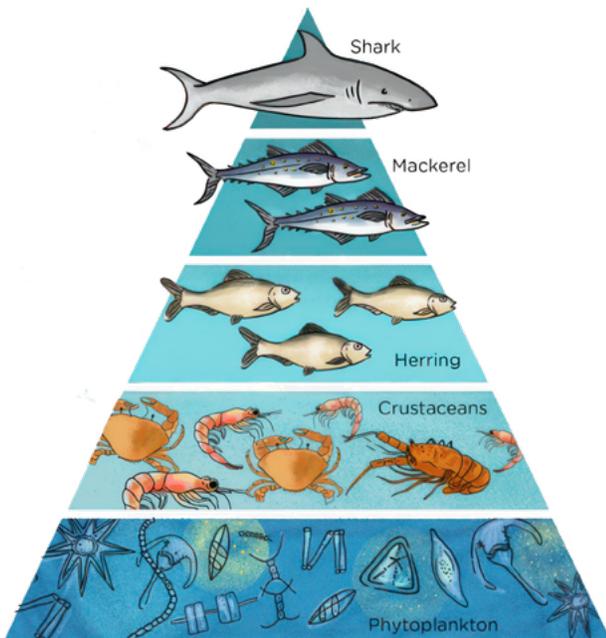
POWERS	PLANTS	ANIMALS	HUMANS
Eat	x	x	x
Grow	x	x	x
Reproduce	x	x	x
Move from place to place		x	x
Use the senses		x	x
Feel emotions		x	x
Think			x
Choose			x

EXAMPLES OF HIERARCHIES

Food Chain Hierarchy



Sea Food Chain Hierarchy



Hierarchy of Being

