***Food Chains and Webs --- "What's for dinner?"***

Every organism needs to **obtain energy** in order to live. For example, **plants get energy from the sun**, some animals eat plants, and some animals eat other animals.

A **food chain** is the sequence of **who eats whom** in a biological community (an ecosystem) to obtain nutrition. A food chain starts with the **primary energy source**, usually the **sun** or boiling-hot deep-sea vents. The next link in the chain is an **organism that makes its own food** from the primary energy source -- an example is **photosynthetic plants** that make their own food from sunlight (using a process called **photosynthesis**) and **chemosynthetic bacteria** that make their food energy from chemicals in hydrothermal vents. These are called **autotrophs** or **primary producers**.

Next come organisms that eat the autotrophs; these organisms are called **herbivores** or **primary consumers** -- an example is a rabbit that eats grass. The next link in the chain is animals that eat herbivore - these are called **secondary consumers** -- an example is a snake that eats rabbits. In turn, these animals are eaten by larger **predators** -- an example is an owl that eats snakes. The **tertiary consumers** are eaten by **quaternary consumers** -- an example is a hawk that eats owls. Each food chain ends with a **top predator** and animal with **no natural enemies** (like an alligator, hawk, or polar bear).

**Food Chain Questions**

1. What travels through a food chain or web?
2. What is the ultimate energy for all life on Earth?
3. Food chains start with what?
4. The 1st organism in a food chain must always be what type of organism?
5. Name 2 food making processes.
6. Where do chemosynthetic bacteria get their energy?
7. Define herbivore.
8. Herbivores are also called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
9. What are animals called that feed on herbivores?
10. Secondary consumers are eaten by larger \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
11. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ consumers eat secondary consumers.
12. Make a food chain with a producer and 3 consumers.

The arrows in a food chain show the flow of **energy**, from the sun or hydrothermal vent to a top predator. As the energy flows from organism to organism, energy is lost at each step. A network of many **food chains** is called a **food web**.

**Trophic Levels:**
The trophic level of an organism is the position it holds in a food chain.

1. **Primary producers** (organisms that make their own food from sunlight and/or chemical energy from deep sea vents) are the base of every food chain - these organisms are called **autotrophs**.
2. **Primary consumers** are animals that eat primary producers; they are also called **herbivores** (plant-eaters).
3. **Secondary consumers** eat primary consumers. They are **carnivores** (meat-eaters) and **omnivores** (animals that eat both animals and plants).
4. **Tertiary consumers** eat secondary consumers.
5. **Quaternary consumers** eat tertiary consumers.
6. Food chains "end" with top predators, animals that have little or no natural enemies.

When any organism dies, it is eventually eaten by **detrivores** (like vultures, worms and crabs) and broken down by **decomposers** (mostly bacteria and fungi), and the exchange of energy continues.

Some organisms' position in the food chain **can vary as their diet differs.** For example, when a bear eats berries, the bear is functioning as a **primary consumer**. When a bear eats a plant-eating rodent, the bear is functioning as a **secondary consumer**. When the bear eats salmon, the bear is functioning as a **tertiary consumer** (this is because salmon is a secondary consumer, since salmon eat herring that eat zooplankton that eat phytoplankton, that make their own energy from sunlight). Think about how **people's place in the food chain varies - often within a single meal!**

**Food Web Questions**

1. What is used to indicate the flow of energy in a food chain or web?
2. What happens to energy as we move from step to step in a chain or web?
3. Define food web.
4. What is meant by trophic levels?
5. Define autotroph.
6. The 1st trophic level consists of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ producers called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
7. Name the 2nd trophic level (both names).
8. Secondary consumers may be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ eating meat or \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that eat both plants and animals.
9. What is the 3rd trophic level called?
10. What is the 4th trophic level called?
11. At the 5th trophic level would be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ consumers that eat \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ consumers.