

Coral Reef Ecology Program

The coral reef ecology program is a part of MarineLab's core curriculum. Corals are the key component to the Florida Keys' marine ecosystem. Students discuss coral reef ecology with a MarineLab instructor before boarding the boats to snorkel the coral reefs off of Key Largo. While always dependent on conditions, we generally snorkel two sites. MarineLab staff will be in the water and on the boat to lifeguard, point out marine life, and discuss observations.

Grade Level: All

Timing: Class is one hour and field trip is 3 hours (field trip can be shortened, if necessary)

Concepts Covered:

- three types of corals and coral reproduction
- ecological and economical importance of coral reefs in the Florida Keys
- mutualistic relationship between coral and zooxanthellae
- Abiotic conditions necessary for healthy coral reefs
- Disturbances to corals in the Florida Keys and coral reef protection efforts in the Florida Keys
- Fragility of the coral colony and proper coral reef snorkeling etiquette

Vocabulary: ecology, hexacoral, gorgonian, octocoral, spur and groove bank reef, patch reef, mutualistic symbiosis, zooxanthellae, coral bleaching, salinity, diversity, polyp, nocturnal, oligotrophic, mooring buoy, fragmentation

Extensions:

- Ask staff about our efforts in collaboration with the Coral Restoration Foundation (<http://www.coralrestoration.org/>) and Mote Marine Lab (<https://mote.org/research/program/coral-reef-science-monitoring/bleachwatch>).
- Coral Reef Ecology II: A Closer Look
- Coral Restoration

Resources: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/corals/welcome.html>

Standards Supported:

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards

SC.5.L.17.1: Compare and contrast adaptations displayed by animals and plants that enable them to survive in different environments such as life cycles variations, animal behaviors and physical characteristics.



SC.7.L.17.2: Compare and contrast the relationships among organisms such as mutualism, predation, parasitism, competition, and commensalism.

SC.7.L.17.3: Describe and investigate various limiting factors in the local ecosystem and their impact on native populations, including food, shelter, water, space, disease, parasitism, predation, and nesting sites.

SC.912.L.17.2: Explain the general distribution of life in aquatic systems as a function of chemistry, geography, light, depth, salinity, and temperature.

SC.912.L.17.4: Describe changes in ecosystems resulting from seasonal variations, climate change and succession.

SC.912.L.17.6: Compare and contrast the relationships among organisms, including predation, parasitism, competition, commensalism, and mutualism.

SC.912.L.17.8: Recognize the consequences of the losses of biodiversity due to catastrophic events, climate changes, human activity, and the introduction of invasive, non-native species.

Ocean Literacy Principles:

Principle 3. The ocean is a major influence on weather and climate.

f. The ocean has had, and will continue to have, a significant influence on climate change by absorbing, storing, and moving heat, carbon and water. Changes in the ocean's circulation have produced large, abrupt changes in climate during the last 50,000 years.

g. Changes in the ocean-atmosphere system can result in changes to the climate that in turn, cause further changes to the ocean and atmosphere. These interactions have dramatic physical, chemical, biological, economic, and social consequences.

Principle 5. The ocean supports a great diversity of life and ecosystems.

c. Most of the major groups that exist on Earth are found exclusively in the ocean and the diversity of major groups of organisms is much greater in the ocean than on land.

d. Ocean biology provides many unique examples of life cycles, adaptations and important relationships among organisms (symbiosis, predator-prey dynamics, and energy transfer) that do not occur on land.

Principle 6. The ocean and humans are inextricably interconnected.

d. Humans affect the ocean in a variety of ways. Laws, regulations and resource management affect what is taken out and put into the ocean. Human development and activity leads to pollution (point source, non-point source, and noise pollution), changes to ocean chemistry (ocean acidification) and physical modifications



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(changes to beaches, shores and rivers). In addition, humans have removed most of the large vertebrates from the ocean.

e. Changes in ocean temperature and pH due to human activities can affect the survival of some organisms and impact biological diversity (coral bleaching due to increased temperature and inhibition of shell formation due to ocean acidification).