Consumers: “Eaters”
An organism (from tiny to large) that consumes producers or other consumers for food. Consumers are made up of two groups: First consumers (herbivores), and Second consumers (carnivores). Omnivores, organisms that feed on both plants and animals, sometimes act as first consumers, sometimes as second.

First Consumers
Herbivores: “Animals that eat plants”
Omnivores: “When they eat plants”

Second Consumers
Carnivores: “Animals that eat animals” also called predators.
Omnivores: “When they eat animals”.

Producers: “Makers” An organism that makes its own food from the energy of the sun, and nutrients in soil, air and water. All green plants are producers, as are algae.

Soil and Nutrients for New Growth.
New plant growth comes from food (nutrients) in the soil and water, air (carbon dioxide) and sun (energy). Nutrients in the soil, water, and air are available to plants through the process of decomposition. Many minerals (from rocks) in the soil are only available to plants through soil organisms.

Decomposers “Breakers”
Decomposers are tiny organisms (from insects to bacteria to fungi) that are involved in the process of breaking down dead plants and animals into tiny matter, which is eventually converted into nutrients and gases that become food for producers.

Fact: 90% of plants in Pacific Northwest forests grow on decomposing forest debris.

Teacher background information, suggested terms and definitions for elementary grades (K-5). Review this prior to presenting ‘Cycle of Renewal’ activity to the class. Determine the terminology and discussions appropriate for your class maturity and knowledge level. Present in a clockwise manner starting with the Producers.

Fact:
90% of plants in Pacific Northwest forests grow on decomposing forest debris.

4a How-to-do Activity: Cycle of Renewal
Terminology & Definitions

Dead Matter
The “remains of plants and animals” and “animal waste”

Forest Floor Decomposers and Consumers

Seavengers: Organisms such as earthworms, slugs, larvae of beetles, termites and flies, that break down larger dead matter (woody debris, animal remains, dung, etc) into smaller matter (usually known as humus).

Microscopic decomposers: Usually microscopic bacteria and fungi that break down the smaller matter created by the scavengers into minerals and gases (nutrients).

Predators: Tiny animals that eat decomposers. These include ants, centipedes, sow bugs, and some bacteria.