

# Edible Coral Polyps

## Introduction

In the book *On Kiki's Reef*, author Carol L. Malnor introduces children to life on a coral reef. Although a coral looks like a rock, the surface of the reef is covered with a layer of living corals. In this activity, children learn about coral as they create an "edible coral polyp." This activity is adapted from the California Academy of Sciences.



## Key Concepts

- ◆ Corals are animals called polyps.
- ◆ When polyps die, their skeletons form the coral reef.
- ◆ A type of algae (zooxanthellae) lives inside the tissues of the coral, providing them with energy.

## Procedure

1. View photos of this activity at the California Academy  
<http://www.calacademy.org/teachers/resources/lessons/build-a-coral-polyp/>

1. In your own words, explain corals using the information in

the back of *On Kiki's Reef* titled "A rainbow of corals puts on a show." Tell students that corals are animals. They don't have plant parts and can't make their own food. Corals are unusual animals because a type of algae lives inside their tissues and gives them energy.

2. Tell students they're going to make a model of a coral polyp that they can eat. Pass out materials.

3. Give them the following directions:

- Place the banana section on the paper plate. Make a hole (the mouth) in the top of banana using the straw.
  - Create six holes with a toothpick surrounding the central mouth. Poke 6 candy straws or twizzlers (the tentacles) into the holes.
  - Add sprinkles (zooxanthellae) to the banana.
  - Spread jam on a round cracker and place the banana on top of it (coral is attached to the substrate).
  - Add oyster crackers around the base (calcium carbonate skeleton). Notice that the skeleton is on the outside of the coral polyp. When polyps die, living corals grow on top of the skeletons building up a coral reef.
4. Tell students they can pretend to be a parrotfish that eats coral. They can eat their polyps, but since fish don't have hands, encourage your students to eat without using their hands.

Note: Before eating their polyps students can place individual coral polyps together to form a colony.

## Nature Connections

- ◆ Look at the map in the back of the book to identify where coral reefs are found around the world.
- ◆ Bring in samples of coral for students to touch.
- ◆ Look through the illustrations in the book to notice the different shapes and colors of actual corals.

## Materials Needed

- ◆ Paper plates (1 per student or group)
- ◆ toothpicks (1 per student or group)
- ◆ plastic straw (1 per student or group)
- ◆ 2 inch sections of banana (1 per student or group)
- ◆ sour candy straws or twizzlers cut into 1 inch pieces (6 per student or group)
- ◆ sugar sprinkles (same color as the sour candy straws or twizzlers)
- ◆ jam
- ◆ round crackers (1 per student or group)

## Additional Resources

### Over in the Ocean, In a Coral Reef

<http://www.dawnpub.com/our-books/over-in-the-ocean-in-a-coral-reef/>

### Fun facts and photos of coral and coral reefs:

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/coral/>

<http://kids.nceas.ucsb.edu/biomes/coralreef.html>

[http://www.ecokids.ca/pub/eco\\_info/topics/oceans/coral\\_reefs.cfm](http://www.ecokids.ca/pub/eco_info/topics/oceans/coral_reefs.cfm)

<http://www.kidsdiscover.com/spotlight/coral-reefs/>