

# Garden Critter Diaries

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## **Standards of Learning**

Science 1.1, 1.5, 2.1, 2.5, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 4.1, 4.5, 4.9

English 1.2, 1.13, 1.14, 2.2, 2.12, 2.14, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.9, 3.12, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.9, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9

## **Objective**

Students will:

- Read and discuss *Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin
- Research a variety of animals that may find habitats within their school gardens
- Create their own “critter diaries.”

## **Materials**

- *Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin
- Access to the internet or other reference materials
- Student writing and/or science journals (if used)

## **Background Knowledge**

Gardens are full of many more life forms than just plants! With this activity, give your students the opportunity to investigate and explore, from non-fiction and fiction perspectives, the lives of garden critters. There are many different garden critters that can depend on the size of the garden that they inhabit. Most gardens have insects like worms, crickets, spiders, frogs, beetles, or ants. However, there are other, larger animals that can inhabit a garden as well. Deer, groundhogs, moles, rabbits, or snakes can inhabit a garden especially when they are stopping by for a snack. This will be an interesting way to expand the list of animals that your students may have generated and to see what these animals like to eat. If you do not have a school garden, this activity can be adapted to explore any outdoor area that is available to you and your students.

## **Procedure**

1. Read and discuss *Diary of a Worm* with the students. This book, written in journal format, portrays the daily life of a juvenile worm – probably the age of your elementary students.
2. Have the students create a list of activities described in the book that earthworms actually do. Examples include digging tunnels in the ground and eating compost. Students should also be able to describe an earthworm’s habitat.
3. Earthworms are just one of many forms of life that students will find while exploring their school gardens. Ask students to brainstorm a list of other animals, including insects, which may be found in their gardens.
4. To find a list of native animal species in your area, use the internet resources provided by the Virginia Fish and Wildlife Information Service. Go to <http://vafwis.org/wis/visitor/geographic.asp?sID=73066&In=v&nav=geographic> – at this site you can search for wildlife in your area using a map, latitude/longitude coordinates, or name of a place.
5. From this list, each student should choose or be assigned an animal to research. Research can be done from this web linked list. Additional research can be sought in the school or local library. Please note that this is a complex list – teachers may want to simplify this part of the activity by identifying and then choosing the animals for their students, as well as providing access to easier research information, such as local field



guides.

6. Once students have completed the research on their animal, they are ready to begin their fiction writing assignment. As the young worm did in the book, students imagine that they are their animal and create a journal using facts gathered from their research. Make sure that students describe what it would be like to be a critter that has made your school garden his habitat. Is he satisfied with your school garden – does it meet his life needs – or does he have suggestions for change? Students can create their critter diaries in their writing or science journals, or they can create a separate booklet. If time allows, illustrations should be added.

### **Extension**

Students should share their critter diaries with the class. This can be done presentation style or in a small group setting.

Discuss with the students which animals are most likely to appear in your school garden and why. This discussion should focus on students being able to describe their school garden as a habitat. What realistic improvements and enhancements should be made to your school garden if your goal is to attract more and/or a wider variety of animals? What problems might this cause?

