



Life under a Log

WHAT'S THE Big Idea? Diversity

Materials

- magnifiers or bug boxes
- "Life under a Log: Critter ID" sheet (Appendix, p.256)
- a rotting log, large rock, or leaf pile to turn over

Enduring Understandings

- Communities are made up of living things.
- Every living thing has a special role in its community.
- Every living thing contributes to its community.
- Living things adapt differently to meet different needs.

Objectives

- Children discover what lives under a log.
- Children demonstrate an awareness of these creatures' roles in the community: making soil.
- Children demonstrate an understanding that a diversity of creatures is needed to have a successful community.
- Children develop empathy through treating other living creatures with respect.

Directions

NOTE: In the classroom, demonstrate how to roll over a log using a real log and plastic worms and spiders. Slowly roll over the log, gently brush aside leaf litter, and carefully look for worms, salamanders, and other living things. Have the children pretend to rub soil into their hands if they wish to pick up or hold a critter. Our hands have soap and other oils that are harmful to critters that breathe through their skin. When it is time to return the creatures to their log, show how to first roll the log back into place, then gently set the creatures next to the log so they can crawl back under it. If you put the creatures back first and roll the log over them, they can be crushed. After practicing with your students, do the following.

1. Ask children if they'd like to see who lives under a log (or rock, or leaf pile). While walking outdoors, find a rotting log, slab of rock, a board, or an area of thick leaf litter.
2. Before approaching, suggest to the children that they might seem like giants to the tiny creatures living under a log. Ask, "How should we behave so as not to frighten or hurt these creatures?" Encourage them to be "gentle giants."
3. Model again how to gently roll over a log and then begin to look closely at the tiny world of creatures who live there. Remind children that the creatures will try to hide as soon as the log is rolled over.
4. Before attempting to pick up any of the creatures, rub soil on the palms of your hands to cover up any soap or lotion. Don't pick up these fragile creatures if your hands have insect spray or sunscreen on them. Earthworms and amphibians, such as salamanders and

toads, breathe through their skin and will suffer from the insect spray and sunscreen. Use bug boxes or magnifiers to examine the creatures. Note the diversity of creatures. Count their legs, note their shapes, and remark on their colors.

5. Explain that slugs, ants, and beetles will eat the log. They will attract spiders, salamanders, and centipedes. Rotting logs provide homes for many critters and they are also places where our valuable soil is made. The creatures turn the rotting log into soil. Remind children to be respectful of our forest recyclers and their homes.
6. Remind children to be gentle giants when “putting the roof back on.” Once the log is rolled back, gently return any salamanders or worms to the edge of the log and they will return to their home. If you put the creatures back first then roll the log over, the critters may get crushed.
7. Process and reflect on the experience with the children by engaging in a conversation guided by the discussion questions. Children can also record their findings in journals.

Discussion Questions

- Who lives here?
- What are they doing?
- What else is here besides the critters?
- Are these critters a community? Why or why not?
- How is the log community like the community you live in?
- Where do you think soil comes from?
- How does soil made by creatures help people?
- How do the creatures living under a log help one another?
- What would happen if only one kind of creature lived under the log?

Extensions

- ***A Log's Life*** by Wendy Pfeffer
- ***What's Under the Log?*** by Anne Hunter
- ***A Salamander's Life*** by John Himmelman
- Make a large mural of a rotten log with windows cut out in it. Children can draw the creatures they found and place them in the log behind the flaps.
- Collect different types of soil (driveway, garden, humus), mix with water and create a painting with mud.
- With a large empty box, construct a rotting log that children can crawl into, role-playing the creatures they spotted making the soil.

