

LIVING LARGE WITH EARTHWORMS

by Charlie Buck

Literary Model: Slightly inspired by cinquains

Lesson Plan

Earthworms are amazing! They have five hearts and no eyes. Each worm has male and female sex organs. They live underground and breathe through their skin. Their streamlined shape allows them to burrow through soil. They have strong circular muscles but no skeleton. They can live up to eight years. On an average day they digest half their body weight. They eat rotting food and organic material and turn it into richest natural fertilizer known to humans. And they are the easiest live animal to bring into a classroom for young writers to observe and respond to.

Organic farmer Keith Thomson brought a bin of earthworms to the third-grade class I was teaching in and gave students the opportunity to handle them. We gave each table a few earthworms on a paper plate. Squeamishness quickly gave way to close examination. As Thomson discussed various worm adaptations (short hairs on the belly that enable worms locomotion?!!!) students reacted with awe and laughter. What a good place to write from!

We talked about general, predictable initial reactions (“Gross!”) vs. specific observations, which can often be surprising: What did they see?

As students described how the worms looked and felt, I wrote their adjectives on the board: Wet, soft, gummy, jelly, slimy, sticky, dirty, dusty, muddy, pink, red, brown, curious, stretchy, strong, hungry, friendly, shy, weird, creepy, happy, quiet, silly, funny.

They described the worms’ movement: Inching, sliding, tickling, slithering, creeping, crawling, curling, twisting, sneaking, circling, dancing, stretching, squirming, escaping, wiggling, nosing, tunneling, hiding, eating, pooping, growing.

Then they wrote, describing the worms with two adjectives on one line, three verbs on the next line. They asked the worms questions, and sometimes answered them. For students in the early stages of literacy, this worksheet format might be helpful, customized with words they came up with. For students who are comfortable writing, the cinquain might be a fun form for their observations.

This lesson can be adapted to any living thing.

Red Wiggler Dancing

Dancing Worm
Stretchy, Brown
Twisting, Dancing, Wiggling

Q: "What do you do with seven hearts?"

A: "I live LARGE!"

— Katherine Barreras Vasquez

Squirm Worm

Curious, Stretchy
Slithering, Twisting, Escaping
Worming 2.0
How do you live?
What do you do to entertain yourself?
"I take care of the world."

— Nathan Aguilla

Twist

Stretchy, Hungry
Twisting, Sneaking, Relaxing
Are you getting big-BIG?
Can I touch you?
You look strong!

— Elijah Bishop

Killer Worms

Creepy, Hungry
Crawling, Eating, Growing,

Don't eat me!
Don't eat my car!
Don't eat my home!
Don't eat my dog &
Don't eat my cat!

(These worms tried to *kill* me!)

— Mauricio Armenta

_____ Worm Worksheet _____

1. Your title _____

2. Describe it with two adjectives:

_____, _____

3. Three action verbs to tell us what it does:

_____, _____, _____

4. What would you like to ask or tell a worm? What would it say if it could talk?

Adjectives: Wet, Soft, Gummy, Jelly, Slimy, Sticky, Dirty, Dusty, Muddy, Pink, Red, Brown, Curious, Stretchy, Strong, Hungry, Friendly, Shy, Weird, Creepy, Happy, Quiet, Silly, Funny

Action Verbs: Worming, Inching, Sliding, Tickling, Slithering, Creeping, Crawling, Curling, Twisting, Sneaking, Circling, Dancing, Stretching, Reaching, Squirming, Escaping, Wiggling, Nosing, Tunneling, Relaxing, Hiding, Eating, Pooping, Growing,

Facts: Worms have five hearts and no eyes. They live underground and breathe through their skin. They have lots of muscles. They eat garbage and turn it into fertilizer.
