

Ditch the Desk

Backyard Critters: Slugs, Snails, and Worms

Introduction

My friends suggested this unit. The idea is to learn about the creatures that may be living in your own backyard. However, depending on where you live, you may or may not have all these critters in your backyard. If you live in an urban environment and can't find enough living creatures to study, try to look in nearby places where some might be hiding, like parks, riverbanks, or nearby nature preserves.

This unit is very science heavy, but I will try to include options for some other subjects as well. Keep in mind that any hands-on science activity can be turned into a writing opportunity by having your children record their observations in a science journal.

For extra visuals and fun ideas, check out my Pinterest page for this unit at: <https://www.pinterest.com/davidholden3158/backyard-critters-for-ditch-the-desk-part-one/>.

Estimated Time Needed

- Times will vary depending on the activities you choose

Materials Needed

- Materials will vary depending on the activities you choose

Preparation

Read through the lesson and decide which activities you want to do. There are a lot of ideas in here. You can do them all or pick the ones that work best for you and your children. Once you decide what you are going to do, gather the materials you will need, plan what days you will complete each activity, and estimate how much time you will need.

Worms

Science – Explore Worms

The awesome thing about worms is that almost everyone can find some. Most children will already be familiar with worms but may not have taken the time to really examine them.

We are vegan pacifists in our house, so I am not going to suggest that you dissect anything. But take some time to really watch some worms. Seeing how they move and discovering all the parts of a worm is a great science activity for young kids.

There are a lot more parts of a worm than most people realize. Worms look very simple with no body segments, no arms, legs, or discernible faces. However, worms are rather complex.

Learn more about worms with this website: <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/worms/>. It is an incredibly cool and well put-together site with more information about worms than I knew. There is information about worm anatomy (written to engage kids), and it even tells you how to make a worm bin and why you might want to do such a thing.

If your children are too advanced for the information in the previous link, then they may be interested in the following site, which gives an overview of how worms are made, as well as information on digestion, respiratory and circulatory systems, and reproduction: <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~rlnet/Earthworms.html>.

Science – Worm Habitat

Make your own worm habitat. Use a clean two-liter bottle, a small plastic animal tank, a glass goldfish bowl, or any similar container to make your own worm observatory. Layer dirt and sand in the container. Moisten the dirt and sand, add worms, and place vegetation such as grass, leaves, or lettuce on top. You should be able to watch the worms making tunnels in the dirt and see firsthand what worms do for our soil and how they aid decomposition.

Writing and Art – Worm Picture

After your children have had a chance to observe some worms and learn about how worms live and what they do, give each child a large piece of paper and some construction paper to create a picture of a worm habitat. Make sure they include plants for the worms to eat, dirt for the worms to tunnel in, and whatever else the worms may need.

Then have your children label each component of their picture, according to their ability. For some, this may be one word, and for others, it may involve several sentences explaining how each component is vital to an earthworm's health. Have them write their labels on lined index cards and glue them to the picture.

Science Experiment

Create a science experiment to answer the question of which type of soil earthworms prefer. Your children could create their own experiment if they are up for that. If you need a little help figuring out how to put an experiment together, this site provides more information: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/bring-science-home-squirmy-science/>.

Snails and Slugs

Science – Information about Snails and Slugs

Snails are gastropods. They are a type of mollusk, like clams and other shelled marine creatures. Snails consist primarily of a head and a long-flattened foot. However, snails and other mollusks are incredibly complex creatures.

Here is some information about gastropods: <http://www.biokids.umich.edu/critters/Gastropoda/>.

Many of the sites detailing snail anatomy are very detailed. Here is a website with a less complex version of a snail's anatomy: <https://escargot-world.com/snails-anatomy/>.

This website is more detailed and (warning) includes labels for reproductive parts: <http://www.visualdictionaryonline.com/animal-kingdom/mollusks/snail/anatomy-snail.php>.

There really is not a wealth of information available about slugs unless you would like to know how to get rid of them. With that being said, here is a great PDF with basic facts about slugs, including anatomy: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220327051456/http://www.lakesidenaturecenter.org/AOM%20-%20Slugs.pdf>.

The following sites could be helpful in comparing and contrasting different species of slugs.

- http://www.biokids.umich.edu/critters/Limax_maximus/
- http://www.biokids.umich.edu/critters/Arion_silvaticus/

Science – Snails as Pets

Snails can be a very interesting pet for your children. Not everyone can find snails in their backyard, but if you can, you may choose to keep one temporarily. Otherwise, you may be interested in purchasing one from a pet store and keeping it more long term.

Keeping a snail as a pet takes little upkeep, and the set-up can be fairly simple and inexpensive. This site has some basic information and gives a list of supplies and ideas for how to care for a pet snail: <https://mothernatured.com/pet-ideas-for-kids/keeping-garden-snails-as-pets/>.

Snail Lapbook

Put together a lapbook with information you learn about snails. Homeschool Share has a great lapbook to use if desired. You can find it here: <http://www.homeschoolshare.com/snails.php>.

Writing

Have your children write a research report about snails, slugs, or worms. They can either choose a specific type of snail, slug, or worm or write about snails, slugs, or worms, in general.

Depending on their writing skills and whether or not they have written a research report before, you can use a format provided at the end of this lesson or whatever you are already comfortable with.

Here are some suggestions.

- Make an *All About* _____ book. There is a basic template at the end of this lesson you could use, if desired. Have your children use nonfiction sources (either books or Internet sources). I made these types of books with my children once they had some basic reading and writing skills.
- Use a graphic organizer to record the information your children find. Organize this information into a logical order and write a research report, using the graphic organizer as a guide. Record which sources were used on a separate page and include it in the report. At this point, it is enough for them to just write the book title and author or the webpage link as a source.
- Write the information about their creature on index cards. Use an index card for each basic type of information, such as habitat, diet, reproduction, appearance, etc. Record the sources used on the back of the index cards. Write the report using the information from the index cards as a guide. Include a bibliography or works cited page but don't worry too much about formatting this properly. At this point, the idea is for them to learn to include the information.

SchoolhouseTeachers.com note: Parents should closely monitor children's use of any Internet sites for suggested viewing, along with articles and videos cited in any lessons. While every effort is made to secure information from sites that are family friendly, information on the Internet changes quickly, and our desire is to help you minimize your students' exposure to potentially offensive content. We also recommend viewing any videos on a full screen setting in order to minimize any exposure to potentially offensive ads or inappropriate comments beside or beneath the video.

All About

By

SAMPLE

Table of Contents:

Page _____	Parts of
Page _____	Habitat
Page _____	Diet
Page _____	Fun Facts

SAMPLE

Parts of _____

(Draw and label your animal.)

SAMPLE

Where does it live?

Draw a picture of the place your animal lives.

What does it eat?

Draw a picture of what your animal eats.

Fun Facts About _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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Animal Report Graphic Organizer

Questions	Answers/Details
What animal is my report about?	
Where does it live?	
What does it eat?	
Does it live in groups?	
What are its predators?	
What are some fun facts about my animal?	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Books and Websites I Used for My Research

Book or Website	Title and Author or Webpage Address

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