Wrigglolympics

AN ACTIVITY TO DO AFTER VISITING GEELONG BOTANIC GARDENS

It's understandable that many kids (and adults) think there's nothing going on under the soil. This activity uses the fascination of earthworms to unlock the idea that there's a vibrant community of life right under our feet. If a single teaspoon of soil can hold up to a billion bacteria, imagine how much life there is in a whole garden!

If you are doing this activity after visiting the Geelong Botanic Gardens, refer students to the variety of ecosystems they experienced at the gardens, such as the bright, dry open areas of the 21st Century Garden or the shady depths of the fernery. They may also have seen the worm farm in the vegetable garden, where the worms are busy turning organic matter into vermicompost that is good for plants.

Worms evolved from forest-floor organisms and naturally occur in most habitats on the planet, but are particularly abundant in shady, moist soil. In this activity we're going to look at worms as a way to remind students about life in the soil and the role soil plays in different ecosystems.

Victorian Curriculum Links:
Level 3, Level 4 - Science: VCSSU058
Level 5, Level 6 - Science: VCSSU074, VCSSU075

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resources

- One or more plant pots full of good garden soil, slightly moist.
- A small tub of garden worms from a worm farm. Please keep these in a cool place and allow them air holes and bedding such as wet straw until you need them.
- Garden gloves, if required, for students with sensory needs.

Exploring worms

- Discuss handling living things with respect.
- Worms must always be moist because if they dry out they can't breath. Explain that you may drop a little water on the worms as we look at them.
- Take a worm gently in your hand and discuss where students would expect to see worms in gardens.
- Worms have an incredibly important job in the ecosystem and life of plants. They process (eat) dead plant matter. As they wriggle through the soil they 'poo' out rich material that is full of beneficial bacteria that helps plants to grow.
- The tunnels worms make in the soil help water and air to penetrate the soil, further feeding beneficial bacteria.

directions

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- Ask for volunteers to come and stand around the full, damp pot of soil.
- Ask them to hold out a hand.
- Gently drop one worm into each student's hand.
- Explain that you are running a race: whoever's worm disappears first, wins.
- Ask for predictions: which worm will dig into the soil first? (Students usually say the biggest worm).
- Count down 3 - 2 - 1 - GO! Students flip their hand.
- Observe which worm disappears first. (Usually it is the smallest worm, because it has the smallest volume and needs to dig a smaller hole).
- Let other groups have a go.
- Examine worms under magnifying glasses and garden soil under microscopes, if possible.
- Students record observations about a garden area when they take soil samples.
- Compare and contrast between samples.