



## SPRING | Critters

# Wiggly Worms: Signs of Healthy Soil

### Summary:

Earthworms are some of the best indicators of soil health. When they are happy, your garden is happy. Together, we'll hunt for worms and discover that even small creatures can play important roles in our garden.

### Before Visiting the Garden:

**Gather:** A ruler, clear plastic containers, small shovels, gardening claws, and gardening gloves

**Explore:** *Number 11, 1952* by Jackson Pollock: What does this painting look like to you? Can you imagine a worm finding a home here?

**Read:** *Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin and *Illustrated* by Harry Bliss

### In the Garden:

Earthworms are an essential part of keeping our plants and gardens healthy. They provide our soil with nutrients from their castings, worm poop! Earthworms also help to keep our soil soft and breathable by digging tunnels that aerate, or bring air, to the roots of plants.

- Go on an earthworm hunt! Explore the garden to look for earthworms.
- Use gardening claws to gently rake through the soil to find earthworms.
- When you find an earthworm, use a shovel to carefully scoop it into your clear plastic container.
- Place some garden soil in the container. After you find five earthworms, watch the way the worms are moving in the soil. Do they go in straight lines? Curvy lines?

### Questions to Explore:

- What did you notice about the way the worms move?
- Why do you think they moved the way they do? Can you move like a worm?
- Does a worm move differently from the way you move?
- Was it easy or hard for you?

### Activity:

1. Gently stretch one of your worms out on the ground. Use your measuring tape to see how long it is.
2. Now, measure your gardener.
3. Mark along the dirt the length of the worm and the length of your gardener. Discuss the size differences.
4. Talk about how worms, though small, are important to gardens. What important jobs does your gardener do around the garden, your house, or at school?

### Beyond the Garden | Small Plants, Creatures, and People Can Do Big Things!

Brainstorm together some ways that you can help make your neighborhood a healthier space.

- Is there a spot that could use some trash removal? Could you plant some flowers in an area that needs color? Does your neighbor need help planting their garden?
- Just as an earthworm aerates the soil, you can bring life to your own corner of the world. If you need ideas, check out the Neighborhood Day Project: <http://neighborhoodday.org/ideas/>

### Continue Exploring | Supporting Materials

Fun earthworm facts: <http://www.biokids.umich.edu/critters/Oligochaeta/>