

## The Worm Project

A Project by Pre-K and Kindergarten Children (multi-age and like-age groupings)  
at Donald C. Parker Early Education Center, Machesney Park, Illinois  
Length of Project: 8 weeks  
Teacher: Nancy Plate

### Phase One

#### *Beginning the Project*

Each year, rainy spring days bring out worms, whose appearance peaks the curiosity of our students. In spring of 2002, I decided to cultivate that curiosity by starting a composting system using worms. A grant was written for the necessary materials. This project was open to all interested kindergarten students and at-risk and special education preschoolers. Children represented their previous knowledge on the subject by webbing, doing time-1 drawings, and drawing and writing their predictions about how 1,000 worms would be delivered to our school. Students helped construct the worm bin and readied it for the arrival of the worms.

### Phase Two

#### *Developing the Project*

All investigations for this project took place on site. Some questions included the following: Do all worms turn into butterflies? How do they move through the mud? How long do they live? Do they have very tiny hands?

The worm bin composting system offered a constant supply of worms to study in the classroom. Occasionally, the weather brought worms to the surface of the playground for study. The students used magnifying glasses and the overhead projector to study the worms and their movement up close. For expertise, nonfiction books and information located on the Internet were consulted. Students represented their learning through drawing, writing, movement, constructing with unifix cubes, and yarn. Measuring and counting were practiced as students learned about worm length and worm segments. One fact that seemed to fascinate the students was that worms have five hearts. They chose to represent this information in a variety of ways. During Phase 2, students did time-2 drawings and added information to their original web. Because many different groups of children were studying worms, the project's raw documentation was displayed across the wall of the learning center. This display facilitated groups learning about and questioning what other groups were doing. While the worm project was progressing in the learning center, some individual classrooms were studying caterpillars. Those students participated in making a Venn diagram comparing worms and caterpillars.

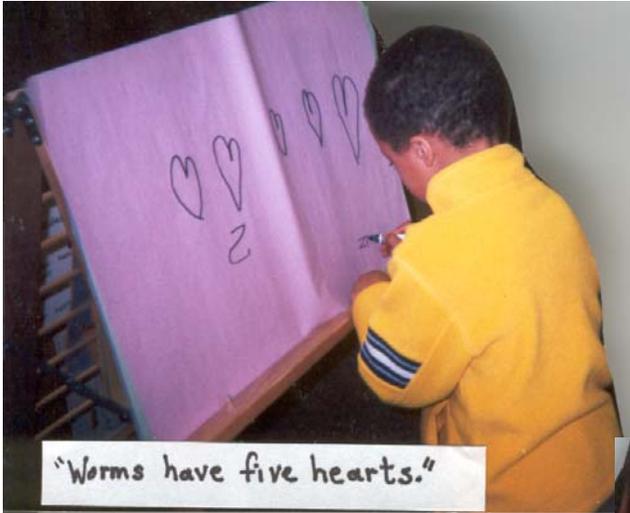
### Phase Three

#### *Concluding the Project*

Finished documentation of this project was displayed in the hallway for parents and teachers. A book written by the students explaining the worm bin building process is housed in the learning center. This book and pictures from the project have stimulated interest from current students in building a worm bin. During the project, measuring, counting, and writing were practiced. The children discovered ways to communicate what they had learned. The students had opportunities to observe and make comparisons. They participated in group discussions and cooperated within their groups. They learned to be respectful of living things.

Comments

What I found most meaningful about this project is how much the children learned from each other. I noticed once again that children are highly motivated to practice skills when they sense an immediate purpose for them, such as writing in a way that would ensure clear communication with others. The models for these skills were often other students. This project provided authentic opportunities for students to communicate and solve problems. They consistently rose to the occasion. As always with projects, I am impressed at the level of concentration young children exhibit when they are investigating a subject that interests them.



"Worms have five hearts."



Looking at worms inside.



Looking for worms outside.