



## Storytelling to empathise with nature

Unfamiliarity, fear or discomfort around nature can be a barrier to children and young people engaging with the outdoors. This activity gives an example of how story books can be used to address these worries, and an accompanying creative activity to encourage learners to develop empathy for and fascination of nature.

This activity uses the book 'Yucky Worms' by Viv French to tackle fear around worms, before learners create their own worm character – but can easily be adapted for another topic. Older learners could explore worms through an alternative book: 'Darwin's Super-Pooping Worm Spectacular' by Polly Owen celebrates the importance of worms through the history of Charles Darwin's investigations.

### Teaching time

30–45 minutes

### Learning outcomes

- Discuss understanding and ideas about an element of nature
- Listen to and comprehend a story read aloud
- Produce a creative outcome in response to a narrative
- Classify and identify invertebrates/animals (depending on book)

### Step by step

Introduce the activity with a short discussion – if reading 'Yucky Worms', you could begin by asking learners to talk to their partner about how they feel about worms, and why they feel this way, before sharing with the group. If you'd like to choose an alternative book, these could focus on bugs and insects, soil or mud, or other wildlife that young people find unfamiliar or provoke fear or discomfort. Take a look at our [Nature library catalogue](#) for examples.

Read the book aloud to the group. If you don't have a copy of the book, you may be able to find 'read aloud' videos online.

After reading the book, prompt discussion from learners on what they've taken away from the story – focusing on both the character's journey as well as the nature around them.

*“What happened in this story? How did the boy feel at the start of the story about the worms? How did his opinion change?”*

*“What do we know about worms now? Why might worms be useful in nature?”*

Next, learners will create their own moving worm character from art materials. If focusing on a different element of nature in your story, this activity could easily be adapted to create another character such as a bee, bird, or spider.

### Green Skills



### Suitable for

Key Stage 1

### Location

Indoors  
Outdoors

### Season

Spring  
Summer  
Autum  
Winter

### What you'll need

'Yucky Worms' by Vivian French (or a story book of your choosing on a similar theme)

Coloured or plain card (you could pre-cut these into strips or ask learners to cut their own)

Pens and pencils

Masking tape or tape

Chopsticks or skewers

Optional: other arts and crafts materials to decorate

### Key vocabulary

Words to describe different feelings  
e.g. discomfort, fear

Words associated with the nature explored  
e.g. habitat, invertebrate

### Support and extension opportunities

Ask learners to create their own story with their characters. This could be a creative writing exercise or drama activity, followed by a presentation of their story.

Use the outdoors as a setting for the storytelling, or ask learners to bring their characters outside and take photographs of them in their “natural habitat”.

Some learners may find sensory aspects of nature difficult, such as worms or mud; it's important to acknowledge the variety of responses we may have to different stimuli. We can reassure learners that all of these responses are okay, whilst gently emphasising the benefits of engaging with nature.



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### **Step by step (continued)**

Make sure that each learner has their own strip of card and materials. Show the group how to fold their card back and forth into a crinkly worm. Invite them to draw a face and, if they like, decorate their worm character.

On the reverse, position one chopstick or skewer at each end of the worm and tape in place. These will act as handles to make the worm come alive!

Encourage learners to come up with a name for their worm character. Where do they live? What do they like to do? Remind learners of what they might have learned from the story. You could use the **Points of view** activity to think about what the character likes, dislikes and needs from their environment.



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