



Secrets of the Apple Tree

by Carron Brown

Illustrated by Alyssa Nassner

Before Reading

- Ask, "What is a secret?" "How can an apple tree have secrets?"
- Look at the cover of the book and ask the children what they see. Point out, if they don't notice, the four cut-outs that show what's hiding in the tree. Ask if those could be the apple tree's secrets.

Exploring Apples

Bring in several varieties of apples to the classroom.

- **Colors:** On a large piece of paper, make a graph of the colors of the apples with a column for red, green, yellow, and a mixture. Put an apple-shaped cut-out in each column that represents the apples you have on hand. Talk about which has the most, the least, the same. Count. Add. Subtract. Compare.
- **Apple peel:** While apples grow, the peel protects the soft part inside. The apple peel also contains a lot of vitamins and fiber. Discuss whether we should eat apples with or without the peel and why.
- **Smell:** Give each child an apple wedge to smell. Help them use as many words as possible to describe the smell. Write the words where all can see.
- **Taste:** Have a tasting party with 3 or 4 different kinds of apples, cut into bite-sized pieces. Make a graph with columns for each kind of apple, for example Granny Smith (green), Golden Delicious (yellow), Gala (red), and Honeycrisp (red & green). Have each child write their name in the column of the apple they like the best.
- **Seeds:** Explain how seeds grow and that apple seeds are not poisonous. Some people eat them on purpose because they believe they will help them be healthier. Have each child draw a face on the side of a styrofoam cup with soil in it. Have them plant grass seed in the dirt and keep watered, avoiding overwatering. When the grass grows it will look like their "person" grew green hair!

Tree Diary: Choose a nearby tree. Ask the children to look for living things in or around the tree and its bark, such as worms, toads, mushrooms, squirrels, bird's nests, etc. Check every few days in the summer and every few weeks in the fall, winter, or spring. Note what changes, what stays the same, what new things appear and what things aren't there anymore. Record the observations in a journal.

Rotting: Leaf litter is a layer of dead and rotting leaves on the ground under trees. Collect some leaf litter in a plastic bag. Spread out newspaper on the floor and shake out the leaf litter. Search carefully for tiny animals such as earthworms, spiders and centipedes. You may want to use a magnifying glass. Put them back outside after you've looked at them.

Worms: Share some general information about worms:

- Worms do not have lungs or gills, so they breathe through their skin. They come up to the top of the ground to get air when it rains.
- Worms are food for birds, snakes, frogs, toads, and moles.
- Worms live in the soil, and they need a covering of dirt and leaves over them.



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- Worms help plants grow by keeping the soil broken down and not hard or crusty.

Literacy Activities

- **Adjectives:** Brainstorm all the words that describe worms. Write the suggestions on a large piece of paper on the wall. Continue to add to the list over time.
- **Phonemic awareness/rhymes:** (a) Throughout the day, say a worm-related word and think of something that rhymes with it, examples: squirmy-wormy, squiggle-giggle, ooey-gooley; (b) Point out words that start with the sound of the letter w.
- **Creative writing:** Using the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," write lyrics about what worms look and feel like, why we think they're cool (or not), what they do in their spare time, what their names are, etc. Have the children write their own or write their ideas on a piece of paper on the wall or on a classroom board.
- **Translations:** Learn the word for *worm* in different languages. Spanish: *el gusano*. Swahili: *minyoo*. German: *wurm*. French: *ver*. Sign language: Find this fun sign with movement on the Internet.

Observation: Bring worms into the classroom with plenty of dirt and leaves. Pour out on a tray and have the children observe what happens. Older children can write down their observations. If you keep the worms for more than one day, make sure they are kept moist and aren't able to get out of their container. Ask the children if they can see patterns in worm activities and if they can start to tell one worm from another.

Art: Put fingerpaint on paper, or put shaving cream directly on the table. Children can make squiggly worm tracks.

Math (sorting/classifying): Provide a variety of plastic fishing worms to sort.

Sensory: Put dirt and water for mud play in a water table or outdoors. Ask the children to describe how the mud feels to them, and how they think the mud feels to different animals in the wild.

Large motor skills

- Demonstrate worm movement by pulling a rope on the ground. Have children jump over the wiggling worm.
- Wiggle on the ground like a worm.
- Play music and have the children make up their own Wiggly-Worm Walk.