



We're going on a Minibeast Hunt ...

June is a lovely time of the year to try an outdoor activity such as a minibeast hunt, where children investigate small animals in the school environment. Log-piles can be placed in the school grounds a few weeks beforehand to encourage minibeast life.

Curriculum strand:

Living things

Strand unit:

Plants and animals
Children enjoy outdoor work and with simple equipment, this can be a positive learning experience. It is important that children work in a scientific way.

Equipment for a minibeast hunt

- Recycled containers eg butter or margarine boxes.
- Old metal spoons.
- Bug viewers.
- Magnifying glasses.
- Gloves.
- A minibeast identification key.

Science Skills

Questioning
Observing
Predicting
Investigating and experimenting
Estimating and measuring
Analysing
Recording and communicating

(Available from the Peat-land Conservation Council or any good educational supplier).

- Pond dials - free download from www.ipcc.ie

Classroom Organisation

Children can discuss minibeasts before going outside and, when back in the classroom discuss and record their observations. Group work is essential for the collection of small animals or minibeasts. The conservation code should be discussed before any work with minibeasts is undertaken.

Conservation Code

- Search carefully
 - Handle animals with care
 - Replace stones and logs
 - Observe, draw and record if possible, rather than handling.
 - Return animals to habitats as soon as possible
- Science Teacher Guidelines page 60.*

Safety

- Children should wear gloves and/or wash their hands after this activity.
- Magnifying glasses should be kept for indoor work.
- Preliminary visits by teachers can be used to identify safe areas for visits.
- Outdoor work or fieldwork must always be in line with school policy.

Starting with the Children's Ideas

Children's ideas can be used as the starting point for the habitat investigation.

In the infant and junior classes secondary sources, such as photographs or pictures can

be used to identify a limited number of minibeasts prior to the fieldtrip. (See p. 67 *Science Teacher Guidelines* for pictures of minibeasts) Children can also discuss and sort minibeast pictures into groups according to certain characteristics, for example number of legs, shells, wings, feelers ... This can naturally integrate with a maths sorting and grouping activity.

Questioning

Observation is best developed through questioning. Some of these open questions can form the basis for investigative work. (See p. 66 *Science Teacher Guidelines* for sample questions on minibeasts)



Key Message

The main objective for children studying animals is to find out about them, rather than name them. They can be guided to identify common plants and animals through the use of identification charts, books and keys.
Science Teacher Guidelines page 64.



Suggested questions

- What is a minibeast?
- What kinds of minibeasts could we find in the school grounds?
- Where would we look for them?

Middle or senior children can consider the different types of minibeasts to be found in the school grounds and draw pictures (annotated drawings) or communicate their ideas to the class.

Supervised groups of children can then go outside with metal spoons and empty containers to search for minibeasts.

A minibeast is a small animal found in land and water habitats

Observing

On the hunt children can observe what type of conditions the minibeast was found in.

- Where does it live?
- Does it like dark or light conditions?
- Does it depend on any plants in the habitat?

They can search in various habitats such as under stones or logs, on a tree trunk or wall or in a hedge. Small animals can be collected carefully using a metal spoon and butter box.

(See p. 78 *Science Teacher Guidelines* – useful techniques for collecting animals).

Back in the classroom *individual* animals or minibeasts can be carefully placed in a bug viewer or observed with magnifying glasses. Animals such as slugs, caterpillars, spiders and snails are slow moving and can be easily observed in the butter box.

- How many legs, wings, eyes, tentacles has it?
- Is the body hard or soft?
- Which animals are similar to each other?
- What animals are different from each other?
- How does it move?

Investigating

- Which moves faster – the slug or the snail? How could we measure their movement for one minute?
- Do the woodlice prefer light or dark conditions? (p. 82 *Science Teacher Guidelines*)
- What do caterpillars like to eat? (p. 80 *Science Teacher Guidelines*)

Recording

Children should be provided with opportunities to make observational drawings of different minibeasts. These can be compared with their original drawings as a form of assessment. Digital photos can also be used to record minibeast activity.

Analysing

- Where do the animals find shelter?

Our thanks to Scoil na Sráithe Móire, Churchill, Co Donegal for sharing their outing with us.



- Is this a good place for the plants and animals to live?
- Are these animals and plants always found together?

Discussing these questions provides an insight into children's understanding of the environmental influences on a habitat and the kinds of organisms the environment supports. It will also encourage children to question and to use their questions to devise investigations.

They can be guided to identify common animals through the use of identification charts,

books and keys. After observing, investigating and recording, the minibeasts should be carefully brought back to their original habitats and children should wash their hands.

See *Science Teacher Guidelines* pages 57 – 85 for more information on Plants and animals.

This article was written by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme Science team. Visit their website www.pfsp.ie for further ideas on plants and animals.

Which moves faster – the slug or the snail?

