

Title: The Salamander Room

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Group Pre-K – Land Habitats: Survival and Adaptation

Potential Essential Question:

“How can we be good neighbors for the living and non-living things in our neighborhood?”

Science Concepts:

- What do living things need to live and grow?
- How do living things depend on other living and non-living parts of the environment?

Invitations/Experiences:

- Before reading the book, **take a walk in the woods** with the class. Invite children to collect items found in the woods (i.e. leaves, moss, rocks, etc. If the children do not collect some of the objects mentioned in the book, make sure that you do). Spend several days observing and discussing these objects together as a class. Add them to your nature table and have children sort and classify them in ways that are meaningful to them. Develop vocabulary to describe and name the objects so they are familiar when you read the book. Have the objects on hand for children to see and touch when reading the book aloud.
- Invite children to **make collages** using their collected items. Explore the different textures and offer follow-up collage experiences focusing on texture using different fabrics, papers, and various other materials.
- Consider as a class whether the book is fantasy or reality. What parts are real? Would it be possible for a child to create a habitat in his/her home in which living things like salamanders could survive and thrive? (See below.) Why would or wouldn't the children want to bring living things home as Brian did? **Invite the children to illustrate and dictate their own stories of being in the woods**, paying special attention to whether they are fact or fiction. Remind them that not all children will have spent significant time in nature, but all can transport themselves using their imagination. During sharing times, ask the class to identify which of their stories (or which components) are fantasy and which are real.
- **Create terrariums** in the classroom, ideally using samples gathered by the children. Select an outdoor space with plenty of plant and animal life that could be visited frequently by the children. Divide the space into smaller plots (3'x3'). Demarcate the sections and invite children, working in assigned small groups, to choose one section to investigate over several visits. Ask children to document their findings through observational drawings, photography, and sample-taking. Designate a shoebox-sized Tupperware container with punctured lid for each group. After discussing safety and protocol for sample-collecting, invite children to add their samples to the containers to make terrariums. (There may also need to be conversations about borrowing a living thing to observe for a few hours, then returning to its natural habitat.)
- Throughout the study, remind the children of the conversation between Brian and his mother: What will their living things need to live and grow? Use books in our bibliography and listed below to support the children's research. **Allow your investigations and experiments to emerge from the children's interests.** Are they particularly drawn to pill bugs? Develop questions around the pill bugs and conduct an experiment designed by the small group or class. Do the pill bugs prefer light or dark? How can they

find out? Do they wonder why the moss in their terrarium stays moist, but the moss on the nature table has dried out? Consider simple, appropriate ways for the groups to share information about their observations and findings. Can one child from each group visit a different group to simply state what they found that day? During whole class discussions, help the groups recognize where their plot is in relation to others' and make connections between location/habitat, and the variation in what living things have been found in these different plots.

- Invite groups to **create real graphs** (i.e. graphs made from real objects) to document the non-living things found in their plots. Show children how to use symbols (from blocks to drawings to coloring squares, etc.) to create graphs of the living things found in their plots. Introduce **surveys** to find out whether other groups have found some of the same living and non-living things.
- Invite the children to collaborate on a field guide to illustrate the living and non-living things found in the habitat. Depending on the children's interests and strengths, they might do the illustrations (consider collage if the group had previous experience with this medium), label, or write a fact. Include any documentation that could provide further information (i.e. photos of the graphs and surveys). Consider "publishing" the field guide and making it available for community members to use. If your land habitat is on your school's campus, provide a copy to the library or invite a group of children to make a waterproof box for the guide to be housed in the woods. If your habitat is in a city park, provide a copy to the Parks and Rec department.
- With the children's active participation, transform a corner of your classroom into a "salamander room." The children will be especially drawn to any large-scale models you can include (i.e. a six-foot tree they could sit under). Consider with the children the most effective and achievable way to make use of the space and materials available to you. Invite family members in to participate. Borrow nature CD's from the library to add to the ambience.

Local Resources:

- The Peabody Museum of Natural History. Their Discovery Room has a very exciting ant leaf cutting colony, hissing cockroaches, stick bugs, and endangered poison dart frogs. <http://peabody.yale.edu/>
- Common Ground High School has some wonderful school programs: <http://commongroundct.org/environmental-center/childrens-programs/school-field-trips/>
- Ecoworks collects materials destined for disposal and sells them at low-cost to teachers: <https://ecoworksct.org/about/>

Further Information:

- The Peabody also has an online guide to amphibians and reptiles in CT. <http://peabody.yale.edu/collections/vertebrate-zoology/herpetology/online-guide-amphibians-and-reptiles-connecticut>
- Explore the different butterflies found throughout CT. Search for them by name, location, or description. Once you have found the butterfly, you can help your students add a description and photos. <http://www.icbug.org/>
- Learn about bucket brigades – people who help salamanders achieve their yearly migration by helping them to cross roads safely: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/22/us/volunteers-offer-salamanders-a-chance-to-mate.html?>
- <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140412/connecticut-doing-its-part-for-year-of-the-salamander>
- Contribute to UCONN's amphibian tracker: <http://hydrodictyon.eeb.uconn.edu/people/urban/tracker.html>
- Sheehy, S. (2015) *Welcome to the Neighborwood*.
- Breener, B. (2004) *One Small Place in a Tree*.
- Pfeffer, W. (1997) *A Log's Life*.
- Silver, D. (1997) *One Small Square: Woods*.

- Silver, D. (1997) *One Small Square: Backyard.*
- Morgan, E. (2013) *The Next Time You See a Pill Bug.*
- Shea, S. (2011) *Do You Know Which Ones Will Grow?*