When duty calls, Maddie faces her worst fear: worms

The Day the Worms Moved In

About the Article

Levels
Lexile Range: 600L-700L
Guided Reading Level: R
DRA Level: 40

Learning Objectives
Students will identify the parts of a story’s plot in order to understand how events in it change the main character.

Content-Area Connections
Science: the environment, composting, soil
Social-Emotional Learning: identifying emotions, solving problems, self-confidence

Key Skills
Plot, vocabulary, figurative language, inference, setting, character, theme, tone, making connections, explanatory writing

Standards Correlations
This article and lesson support the following Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.6, W.2, SL.1, L.4
Check our website for more standards information.

Your Teaching Support Package
Here’s your full suite of materials, all of which you’ll find at storyworks.scholastic.com:

Audio: Our audio version of this story provides support for struggling readers or works as a read-aloud for your whole class.

Skill Builders to print or project:
• Vocabulary
• Critical-Thinking Question
• Core Skills Workout: Plot, Character, Author’s Craft
• Comprehension Quiz*

*Available on two levels
1. Preparing to Read
Set a Purpose for Reading (5 minutes)
- Call on a volunteer to read aloud the Up Close box on page 11.
- Point out to students the questions in the margins of the story and the arrows that connect each one to a sentence in bold. Preview the questions with them. Draw their attention to the last bubble, on page 14, in which students will write their own questions.

Vocabulary (10 minutes, Skill Builder online)
- Distribute our vocabulary Skill Builder to preview five words. Students will also be able to add other unfamiliar words from the story.
- Vocabulary words include phobia, composting, sawhorses, writhing, and burrow.

Science Connection
This story is all about worm composting—a perfect opportunity to connect reading with your science curriculum! Composting is the way nature recycles biodegradable material. Bacteria, fungi, worms, and insects digest organic matter like leaves and food scraps. They then excrete it as nutrient-rich soil, ideal for growing healthy plants. Check our Can’t Miss Teaching Extras for resources about composting.

2. Close Reading
First Read: Get to Know the Text (20 minutes)
- Have students read the story independently or listen to the audio as they follow along.

Second Read: Unpack the Text (30 minutes)
- Read the story again as a class, pausing to discuss the close-reading questions in the margins. Answers follow.

• Discuss the critical-thinking questions.

Answers to Close-Reading Questions
• Plot (p. 11) Maddie’s problem is that she’s scared to death of worms, and her mother is going to raise worms in their garage. Later, the problem is complicated by Maddie’s trying to keep her worm phobia secret.
• Figurative Language (p. 12) These lines show how jittery the worms make Maddie feel. Seeing her mom hold up a few shocks and disgusts her, and her heart probably starts beating faster out of fear.
• Inference (p. 12) Mom’s excitement shows that she’s not at all afraid of the worms, and she’s happy that she can do something that’s good for the Earth and her garden. You can infer that Maddie’s mom cares about nature and enjoys making things grow.
• Setting (p. 13) The story moves ahead two months in time at this point.
• Character (p. 13) By taking her scraps to the composting bin, Maddie shows that she respects her mother’s wishes and doesn’t want to interfere with the composting project even though she’s afraid of the worms. Maddie probably realizes that her mom is composting for a good cause.
• Plot (p. 13) At this moment, Maddie’s plans to quickly put her toast scraps in the composting bin and leave the garage are completely disrupted. Her worst fear has come true, and suddenly she must figure out what to do next.
• Character (p. 14) This is a moment of truth for Maddie because she will have to face her biggest fear: picking up the worms with her bare hands. Either she will do it and save them—and help her mom—or she’ll let them die, ruining her mom’s big composting plans.
Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers
This story has an audio version, read by one of our editors, and a text-to-speech version, where each word is highlighted as a voice reads it. Both are available at storyworks.scholastic.com, in the teacher portal and Student View.

For Advanced Readers
Invite students to create a character that has a phobia and write a story based around the character's fear. To dig deeper, have them first do research about phobias.

For ELL Students
This story has many contractions, providing a good opportunity for English learners to get familiar with them in context. Guide a small group to do a scavenger hunt for them and ask them to figure out the two words that make up each one.

Write Your Own Question (p. 14) Students will probably write a question similar to: What lesson did Maddie learn by picking up the worms?

Critical-Thinking Questions
• What message do you think the author wants you to take away from the story? (theme) Students might suggest that the author wants readers to realize that it’s possible to face your fears and overcome them. They might say that people can rise to challenges they didn’t think possible, especially when they want to help someone they care about.

• Who is the narrator of the story? How would you describe the way she tells it (for example, serious, angry, funny, etc.)? Support your answer with examples from the story. (tone) Maddie is the narrator of the story, and she tells it in a light, funny way, often using extreme examples to describe things. For example, she says that seeing one worm makes her feel like “being in the path of an oncoming train.” Later she says, “Sharing my home with those things is a living nightmare!”

• After reading this story, would you want to try worm composting? What might be some advantages or disadvantages? (making connections) Answers will vary. Advantages include that it reduces garbage, produces good soil for planting, and can be fun. Disadvantages might include that it can be “gross” for some students or that it takes work.

3. Skill Building
Featured Skill: Plot
• Distribute our plot Skill Builder and have students complete it in small groups. They will then be prepared to respond to the writing prompt at the bottom of page 14.