



# SLUGS

Like many other creatures, slugs can cause considerable damage to crops such as potatoes, wheat, sugar beet, brussel sprouts, cabbages and lettuces. The aim of these activities is to provide children with opportunities to collect, observe and find out about slugs and to consider alternatives to chemical pest control.

This unit would fit any topic or theme involving work on small invertebrates (minibeasts). While the activities may be appropriate to your classroom and school, you may wish to pick and choose – adapt rather than adopt!

You may wish to give the activity cards to the children, or use them as a basis for your own planning. This unit is in three parts:

Part 1 Slug search

Part 2 Adopt-a-slug

Part 3 Slug defence

By using this unit pupils will:

- discover more about an apparently uninteresting and unattractive animal
- devise ways of safely capturing and housing small creatures
- consider humane ways of protecting crops
- develop written and oral reporting skills.

Teaching focus

Pupils should use a variety of domestic and environmental contexts as starting points for learning science. They should have opportunities for first-hand observation. They should learn to take responsibility for the care of living things, maintaining their welfare by knowing about their needs.

Pupils should also develop an awareness and understanding of the necessity for sensitive collection and care of living things, giving attention to their welfare and protection. They should also give some thought to the effects of pollution on organisms.

Managing the unit

This unit aims to raise interest in an apparently unattractive animal. Slug collection (Part 1) could be done out of school, but warn against bringing slugs to school in glass containers. The section on background (Teachers' notes, Part 3) could be read by the pupils themselves, if their reading skills permit.

If you do not like slugs yourself, you probably will not choose to teach this unit! If you are not sure, take care not to send out negative signals to your pupils.

## Part 1 Slug search

- Show the children a variety of vegetables, some of which have been damaged by 'pests'. You might like to discuss what a pest is (see Teachers' notes, Part 3). Organic vegetables may have signs of pest-damage. Most supermarkets have an organic vegetable section.
- Discuss with the children what has happened to the vegetables and what might have been responsible.
- Tell the children that they will be going on a slug hunt, and that they must obey all the health and safety rules.

### Health and safety



The children must be made aware that they are responsible for taking care of the slugs at home and in the classroom.

Children should always wash their hands before and after handling slugs, if they are going to touch them with bare hands. They may prefer to wear thin rubber or plastic gloves or use small polythene bags.

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## Part 2 Adopt-a-slug

- This is a 'jigsaw' activity.
  - The children work in groups with various individuals/pairs deciding which aspect to investigate.
  - They may conduct their investigation/enquiries in the course of a day, or it may require longer, perhaps several weeks.
  - The individual/pairs come back into a group and report back on their enquiries, pooling their findings and contributing to the 'jigsaw' for the class to build up an overall picture.
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## Part 3 Slug defence

- Testing pupils' ideas may take some time; they may wish to redesign traps or try alternative distractions. The unit ends with a question about why some people use insecticides on caterpillars, but protect butterflies.
- Is it 'survival of the cutest'?

### Background notes

The main method of slug control is slug pellets, which contain a pesticide mixed with a bait. It does not leave a residue on crops, but may be harmful to pets or birds if they eat the pellets. It kills the slugs, but, so far, no strain of resistant 'superslugs' has appeared. There are alternatives on the market which are apparently harmless to other animals.

Alternative methods of slug control include removing cover, since sunshine dries up slugs, and biological control – introducing natural enemies of slugs. The only natural enemies of slugs likely to make any large-scale impact are birds, hedgehogs and shrews.

Gardeners often keep down weeds to restrict cover, and spread ash, lime or eggshells which slugs are not keen to crawl across. Beer saucers and grapefruit shells are often used as slug traps. Slugs are active, and therefore more easily caught, at night.

Farmers have tried to control slug infestation by breaking up the soil frequently before planting, compacting the soil and sowing grass, harvesting crops early and removing dead vegetation that could act as a cover.

All these methods have problems, not least cost. Root growth in crops could be inhibited, deep living slugs may be unaffected and they could hinder attempts to improve the structure of the soil.

The search for a harmless but effective universal slug repellent goes on.

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