Bruce is a bookworm. At the moment his other craze is worms. Most especially, he is interested in earthworms. Sometimes, nasty people would try to upset him by calling him a worm. Nowadays he takes this as a compliment. He is reading about worms. Bruce is building a respect for the worm for the very important part it plays in the pattern of nature.

**Worms** live in burrows in the ground. Farmers and gardeners love them. They know that worms are great enrichers of the soil. Their burrows break up the soil, loosening it and letting in air.

**Worms** eat decayed plant matter. They emerge at night, taking their food back inside the burrow with them to enjoy at their leisure.

**Worms** do not have eyes but do have organs that are sensitive to light.

**Worms’** bodies are made up of segments. There are usually about 160 of these. They are stretched and then contracted when the worm moves.

A worm will eat and cast: its own weight every 24 hours. If you have a kilogram of worms in a patch of soil, that’s a kilo of fertiliser being put into the soil every 24 hours. This is far better for the soil than adding artificial chemical fertilisers.

**Worms** belong to a group of animals known as hermaphroditic (when broken into syllables: hem/aph/ro/dites). This means each worm has both male and female parts.

**Worms** are capable of both producing eggs and fertilising the eggs of other worms. This is what happens when earthworms pair. So each worm is the mother of worms produced from its own eggs and the father of worms produced by another worm.

**Young worms** develop in cocoons left in the soil by the parent worm.

Moving left on this page the worm does the following: the chaetae behind the part of the worm’s body called the saddle hold onto the soil and the front part of the body stretches forward; the chaetae in the front section hold onto the soil while those at the back are pulled out. The front section contracts to normal size pulling the rear part forward. The thickened part of the worm’s body commonly called the saddle or ditellum is where cocoons for young worms are produced.

Bruce has decided to make a little compost heap for his new pets. He will use a container with some form of cover but no bottom and with holes in the sides.

Inside he is going to put layers of soil and plant scraps. He will place a handful of worms in the top, put on the cover and visit it regularly to see what takes place. On some of his visits he will drop some grass clippings and leaves and see what becomes of them after a few days. He will water it lightly and often enough to keep it moist but never too damp.

Before learning so much about them, Bruce looked on worms as being fairly uncomplicated fellows. Now he knows better. In fact, they aren’t fellows at all.

You could do this too and learn more about these interesting, helpful creatures.