

TEACHERS GUIDE

to “Go Eat Worms!”

Multidisciplinary classroom activities based on the Young Naturalists nonfiction story in *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, July-August 2026, mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine.

Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine tells stories that connect readers to wild things and wild places. Subjects include earth science, wildlife biology, botany, forestry, ecology, natural and cultural history, state parks, and outdoor life.

Education has been a priority for this magazine since its beginning in 1940. “One word—Education—sums up our objective,” wrote the editors in the first issue. Thanks to the MCV Charbonneau Education Fund, every public library and school in Minnesota receives a subscription. Please tell other educators about this resource.

Every issue now features a Young Naturalists story and an online Teachers Guide. As an educator, you may download Young Naturalists stories and reproduce or modify the Teachers Guide. The [student portion of the guide](#) includes vocabulary cards, study questions, and other materials.

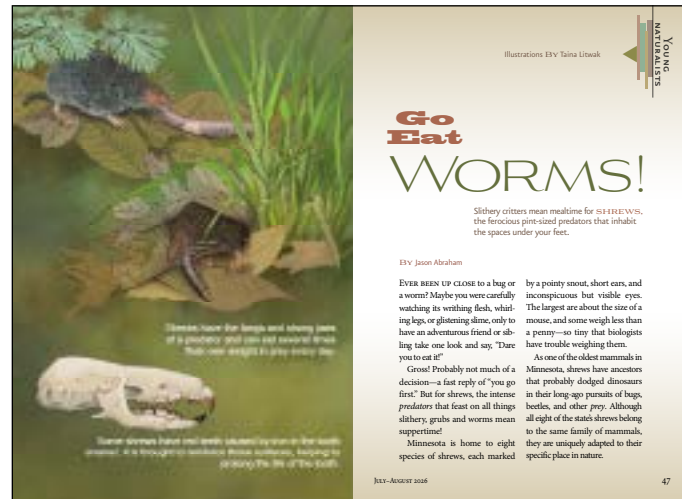
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Find every issue online. Each story and issue is available in a searchable PDF format. Visit mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine and click on *past issues*.

Thank you for bringing Young Naturalists into your classroom!

“Go Eat Worms!”

Multidisciplinary classroom activities based on the Young Naturalists nonfiction story in *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, July-August 2026, mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine.



SUMMARY. Minnesota is home to eight species of shrews. Readers of “Go Eat Worms!” will learn how these pint-sized underground predators are uniquely adapted to their specific place in nature.

SUGGESTED READING LEVELS. Third through middle school grades

MATERIALS. Young Naturalist story and study guide; additional optional resources for extension activities as noted.

PREPARATION TIME. 5–10 minutes, not including time for extension activities.

Estimated instruction time. 45–60 minutes, not including extension activities.

MINNESOTA ACADEMIC STANDARDS APPLICATIONS. “Go Eat Worms!,” and its accompanying Study Guide, may be used to support the following Minnesota Department of Education English Language Arts (ELA, 2020) standards for students in grades 3–8. Described below may be used to support some or all of the following Minnesota Department of Education standards for students in grades 3–8:

Reading: 3.1.1.3, 3.1.4.1, 3.1.5.2, 3.1.7.1, 3.1.8.2, 4.1.1.3, 4.1.4.1, 4.1.5.2, 5.1.1.3, 5.1.4.1, 5.1.5.2, 5.1.5.3, 5.1.8.2, 6.1.4.1, 6.1.5.3, 6.1.8.2, 7.1.4.1, 7.1.5.3, 7.1.8.2, 8.1.4.1, 8.1.5.2

Listening, Speaking, Viewing and Exchanging Ideas: 3.3.2.1, 4.3.2.1, 5.3.2.1, 6.3.2.1, 7.3.2.1

For current, complete Minnesota Academic Standards, see www.education.state.mn.us. Teachers who find other connections to standards are encouraged to contact *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*.

Preview. Introduce students to the Young Naturalists' story using the "4 Ps" (Preview, Predict, Prior Knowledge, and Purpose). First, invite students to preview the article's text features, such as the title, headings, and images, for clues as to what the story will be about. Then, based on the text features, ask students what they predict they will learn. Next, help students make connections to their prior knowledge and experiences by asking questions such as, What do you already know about shrews? Do the images and headings remind you of anything you have experienced, seen, or read? What would you like to learn about Minnesota's shrews? Finally, invite students to think about the author's intended purpose for the story. The following questions may be helpful: Why do you think the author wrote this story? What do you think the author hopes you will think about or do after reading this?

VOCABULARY PREVIEW. Using the Study Guide, introduce students to the story's vocabulary words, indicating that these words may be unfamiliar to them but will appear in the story. Invite them to look at each word, think about its meaning, and then write down a possible definition for each. As your students encounter these words in the Young Naturalist story, you may want to encourage them to infer meaning using context clues, such as other words in the sentence or the story's illustrations. Students can compare their inferences with their earlier guesses and with the suggested definitions shown below.

STUDY QUESTIONS OVERVIEW. Preview the study questions with your class before you read the article. Then read the story aloud. Complete the study questions in class, in small groups, or as an independent activity, or quiz. *Answer Key:* 1. A; 2. D; 3. False; 4. C; 5. D; 6. A; 7. B; 8. False; 9. B; 10. C; Challenge: The heartbeat of an average adult is 60 to 100 beats/minute v. a shrew's heartbeat is 500-1320 beats per minute, depending on the type of shrew. A shrew's heartbeat is much faster – about 10 times as fast as a human heartbeat – or more!

ASSESSMENT. The completed vocabulary and study questions on the Study Guide can serve as an assessment of students' learning. Additionally, the Study Guide includes MN Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) practice items (*MCA Practice Items Answer Key:* 1. C; 2. B; 3. C; 4. A; 5. D; 6. D).

Other assessment ideas include: (1) Have students write their own "Shrew or False" (true-false) questions based on the story for a class quiz. (2) Use a 3-2-1 Summarization: Have the reader write down 3 things they learned, 2 interesting facts, and 1 question they still have. (3) Have students make flashcards, with the name of each shrew on one side of the card, and interesting facts or descriptions of that shrew on the other side. Then, students can quiz each other using the flashcards they created. (4) Have students write one of the main ideas from

the story, along with several supporting details. Then have students “share and compare” their work with a partner to self-assess their learning. As they share, students can think about or respond to questions such as: How were the summaries alike and different? What ideas did you include that were different from your partner’s?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES. The following activities provide examples of how to make connections between the story and related topics while supporting academic standards and/or benchmarks. They can also be used to deepen or extend the learning of individual students, small groups, or the entire class.

1. Invite students to skim or read the Young Naturalist Story, [Curious Creatures](#).

Modeling after the author’s carnival sideshow-style featuring of unusual creatures, have students work in pairs or small groups to design a creature feature for one of Minnesota’s 8 species of shrews. These creature features can be displayed in the classroom or school hallway, so that others can learn about these fascinating, lesser-known inhabitants of Minnesota. [Science (2019). Dimension 1: 8. Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information; Dimension 2: 6. Structure and Function; Dimension 3: LS3. Heredity; Arts (2018). Visual Arts: 5.1.2.2.2, 5.1.3.6.1]

2. After re-reading the section of the story about the water shrew and watching a video of a [water shrew exhibiting water-walking](#), explore the concept of buoyancy by experimenting with peeled and unpeeled oranges to see which float, and how that relates to the trait that allows shrews to walk on water (peeled oranges sink, v. unpeeled oranges float due to the textured skin that traps air). Older students can use this experiment, alongside additional online research, to construct an explanation of the role of air bubbles in the buoyancy of the water shrew. [Science (2019). Dimension 1: 1. Asking questions, 6. Constructing explanations; Dimension 2: 6. Structure and Function; Dimension 3: LS3. Heredity]

3. Invite students to think about why people prefer “cute” animals and might not like or even be afraid of animals that aren’t as “cute.” Then invite students to think about the concept that every animal, regardless of how it looks, has incredible evolutionary traits suited for its environment and has an important role to play within the ecosystem. Ask students to generate a list of shrews’ “superpowers” (or traits that make them so suited to where they live). Discuss with students how judging an animal by its cuteness misses the amazing things it can do or the important role it plays in nature. Older students may be interested in online research to explore how the northern short-tailed shrew’s venom is currently the subject of medical research (such as developing new pain relievers, specific types of cancer therapies, and skin smoothing agents). [Science (2019). Dimension 1: 1. Asking questions; Dimension 2: 6. Structure and Function; Dimension 3: LS3. Heredity]

4. A fable is a short story that conveys a moral or lesson and usually has animals as the main characters. For example, the popular fable, "The Tortoise and the Hare," has a moral: slow and steady wins the race. Invite students to read "[The Shrewd Shrew](#)" and discuss what they think the moral of the story is. After reading the author's intended moral of the story to see how their ideas were similar or different from the author's intended lesson. Then invite students to think about some of their talents and skills and discuss some of the downsides of comparing oneself to others. Students could then create their own fictional stories about a shrew, whether a fable or some other form of a short fictional story of their choosing. [English Language Arts (2020). Reading: 3.1.4.2, 4.1.4.2, 5.1.4.2, 6.1.4.2, 7.1.4.2, 8.1.4.2; Writing: 3.2.2.1, 3.2.6.1; 4.2.2.1, 4.2.6.1, 5.2.2.1, 6.2.2.1, 7.2.2.1, 8.2.2.1; Listening, Speaking, Viewing and Exchanging Ideas: 3.3.1.1, 4.3.1.1, 5.3.1.1]

5. In Minnesota, the [least shrew](#) and the [smokey shrew](#) are listed as species of special concern. Encourage students to note the range maps for these two species. After reading the two DNR guides for these two species (linked in the sentence prior), and with further online investigation of threats to shrews in Minnesota, ask students to describe how state government has addressed threats to species of special concern, and how our national government is working to protect threatened and endangered species. Then ask students to identify actions that people can take to either help support shrew conservation, either directly or indirectly through influencing governmental decisions and actions. Older students can be prompted to further investigate the threats to shrews associated with a changing climate and changing ranges of parasites. [Social Studies (2011). Citizenship and Government: 4.1.1.1.1]

6. Have students investigate differences among shrews and other commonly mistaken species, such as voles, moles, and mice. Using details from the story, as well as additional online research, ask students to create a model (such as a diagram, key, physical model, etc) to highlight key characteristics that can help people differentiate among these species. Older students can also be asked to apply scientific ideas to construct an explanation for the anatomical similarities and differences to infer evolutionary relationships. [Science (2019). Dimension 1: 2. Developing and using models. 6. Constructing explanations; 7. Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information; Dimension 2: 6. Structure and Function, 7. Stability and change; Dimension 3: LS 4. Biological evolution: Unity and diversity]

WEB RESOURCES

MINNESOTA DNR WEB PAGES

GENERAL TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES

[Minnesota DNR Teachers' Resources](#)

[DNR Just for Kids Page](#)

WEB RESOURCES:

[MN DNR Shrew](#)

[North American Least Shrew](#)

[Sorex Fumeus: Smoky Shrew](#)

MINNESOTA CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER STORIES

[Tracks and Trails in the Snow](#)

[The Lowly Shrew](#)

[Curious Creatures](#)

VIDEOS

[Why Do Shrews Eat So Much?](#)

CURRICULA

[The Forest of S.T. Shrew](#)

[Mammals of Minnesota](#)

VOCABULARY LIST

Predator – an animal that hunts, catches, and eats other animals for food

Prey – the animal being hunted and eaten

Crevice – a small split in materials like rock or wood

Pygmy – something unusually small

Gluttonous – eating a lot more than necessary

Venom - a special kind of natural poison that certain animals make

Food caching - when an animal hides or saves extra food in hidden spots so it can eat it later

Boreal - relating to or located in northern regions

Optic – relating to eyes or vision

Vibrissae - specialized, stiff sensory hairs, also known as whiskers

Buoyancy - a special force that pushes objects upward when they are in a liquid

Relentlessness – persistence; refusing to give up or slow down.

warm

mottled – blotchy

peninsula – a portion of land that juts out into a body of water

resin – sticky material that plants produce