

Reading Selection

The Earthworm: Nature's Plow

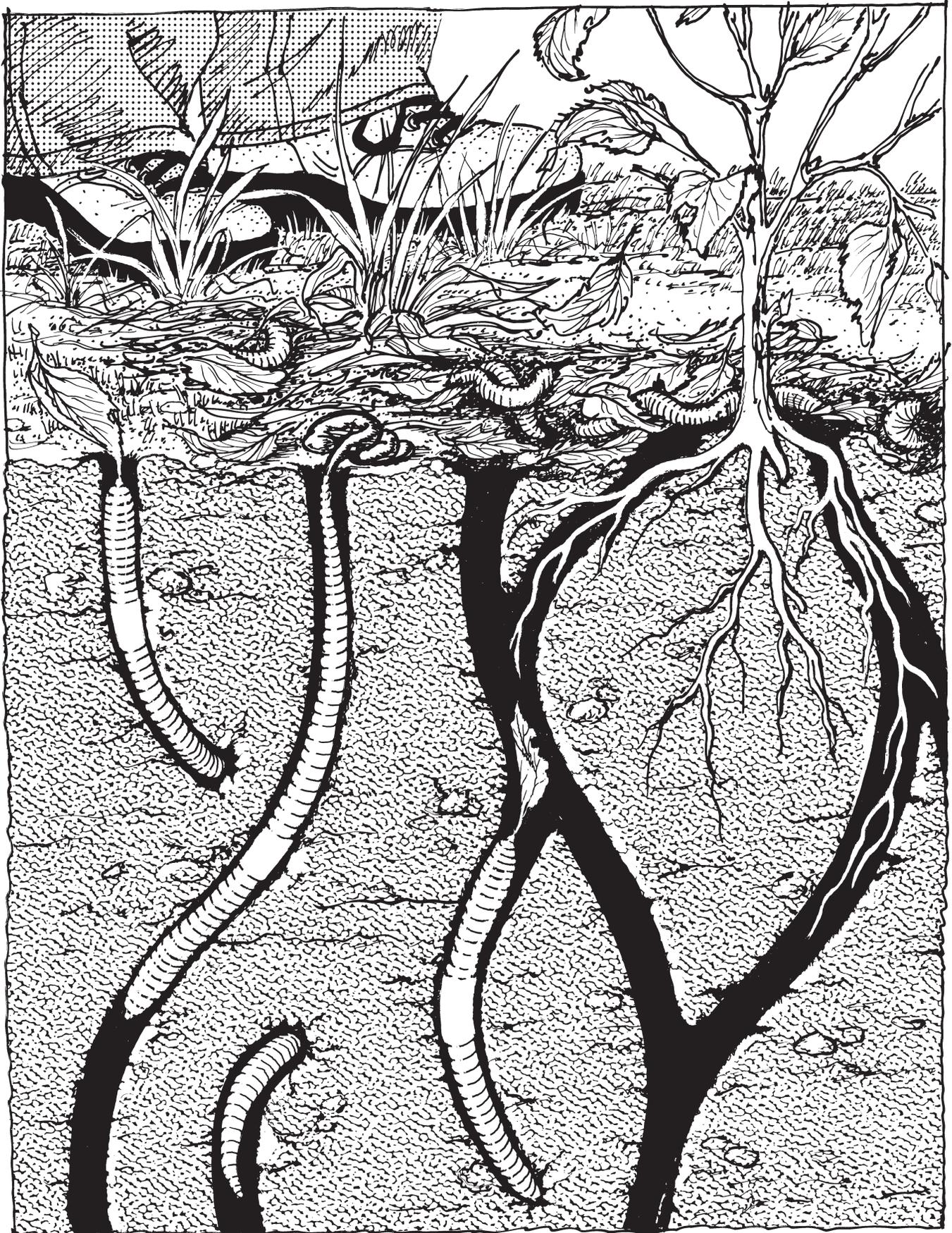
When you go outside, look down. There is a world right under your feet! That is where earthworms live.

Earthworms, redworms, and other worms spend a lot of time in the ground. Sometimes they come up where we are. Do you know where to find them? Look under a pile of old leaves or in a compost pile. Worms go where they can find dead plants to eat.

A worm might seem small and plain. It might not seem important. But a great scientist named Charles Darwin wrote a whole book about worms. He thought they were one of the most interesting animals he had ever studied.

Farmers think worms are great! They know that worms make the soil better for planting. An earthworm eats old leaves and helps turn them into humus. It also eats big clumps of soil. It breaks up the big clumps.

Worms mix the soil nicely. They are like tiny elevators. They carry old plants deep down into the ground. They bring minerals up to the top. Up and down, up and down they go. They can even move small stones! You can see why people like to call them “nature’s plow.”



Can you dig tunnels without a shovel? Earthworms can! They eat their way through the soil. As they go through the soil, they leave a tunnel behind. Stroke a worm gently. Try to feel its tiny bristles. The bristles help the worm hold on to the walls of its tunnel.

Worm tunnels are very important. Each tunnel is an open space in the soil. The tunnels fill up with air or water. Roots and animals under the ground need air and water. They would die without the air and water in the tunnels.

Some roots even use worm tunnels as a place to live! When plants grow big, so do their roots. The roots need to spread out in the soil. The worm has made a path for them. So the roots follow the worm's path.

Have you ever seen worms on the ground when it rains outside? Rain is filling up their tunnels, so the worms must come to the surface. You can see them wiggling and crawling on the ground.

Earthworms are our friends “downstairs.” Next time you jump rope or walk across the street, what do you think the worms will be doing way down under your feet?