Learning at Home Zoo Med Assignment: 2nd-5th Grade

"In My Own Back Yard"

Even if they are very tiny, creatures are all around us and play important roles in our environment. One type of creature that is easy to find and fun to learn about are Isopods, otherwise known as "Roly Polys", "Pill Bugs", "Sow Bugs" and many other names. For this assignment, we will show you how to make an "Isopod Habitat" with items you already have at home! You can then observe your new pets and share with us what you learned.

Materials:

- ☐ **Container that allows for air circulation (Jar, plastic box, etc…)**
- ☐ **Soil**
- ☐ **Dry leaves**
- ☐ **Rotting wood**
- ☐ **Moss**
- ☐ **Water**

Steps:

1. **Clean your container.**
2. **Carefully poke holes into your container or lid.**
3. **Add soil, leaves, rotting wood, and moss.**
4. **Find Isopods and add them to your jar!**
5. **Add water when necessary to keep the substrate damp.**

After you have set up your habitat, make observations of your Isopods and answer these questions:

1. Where did you find your Isopods? _____

_____

2. Describe the habitat where you found your Isopods. _____

_____

_____

3. Were there any other creatures in that same habitat? _____

_____

4. If so, what kind? _____

4. When do you see they are most active?_____

***BONUS* Draw a picture of your Isopod's habitat!**

FUN ISOPOD FACTS

- Isopods are not actually bugs. They are crustaceans like lobsters and shrimp.
- While some other crustaceans may spend some short amounts of time on land, Isopods are the only LAND crustacean. (However there are many species of aquatic Isopods too!)
- Isopods can live about 2 years.
- Most Isopods are nocturnal and most active at night.
- Isopods have 7 pairs of jointed legs, but babies are born with only 6 pairs.
- There are over 10,000 species of Isopod found throughout the world. Over 4,000 species occupy terrestrial habitats.
- Their diet largely consists of rotting vegetation. They are important decomposers!
- Mothers carry eggs in a pouch called a marsupium – after they hatch, they stay in the pouch with their mother for several days before leaving
- They are important for ridding the soil of heavy meal ions by taking in copper, zinc, lead, arsenic, and cadmium, which they crystallize in their midgut. They can survive in contaminated soil where other species can't!