

One Small Thing

ACTIVITY GUIDE

FOR TEACHERS & PARENTS



ABOUT THE BOOK

from the Author

I love reading and writing stories about woodland animals. *One Small Thing* is one of those woodland animal stories.

It may have been fires in California that motivated me to write *One Small Thing*. My husband and I had just moved from beautiful Sonoma County to Florida, but the California fires of 2017 and 2018 affected us, nevertheless. I knew that many neighbors and friends reached out to help people who had lost so much in those fires, and I started thinking about how woodland characters might help a neighbor who had been affected by a fire. Often in the face of tragedy, we don't know what to do, but as we ponder, we realize there is *something* we can do, even if it seems like only “one small thing.”

In *One Small Thing*, Raccoon's home burns down in a lightning storm. His friends don't know what they can do to help. Squirrel, Mouse, Rabbit, and Beaver all go back to their own homes, trying to focus on something other than Raccoon's tragedy. But when each animal—along with Badger—discovers one small thing they can do for Raccoon, it turns out that each small act may not be so small after all.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marsha Diane Arnold

Called a “born storyteller” by the media, Marsha Diane Arnold is the author of picture books that have sold more than a million copies and have been called “whimsical” and “uplifting.” Honors include the Ridgway Best First Book by a New Author, Smithsonian Notable, Children's Choice Awards, and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Her bilingual *Galápagos Girl* was the 2020 Little Read Lakeshore Community Read and won the Green Prize for Sustainable Literature. Her newest book, *Lights Out*, about light pollution, has been praised by the Dark Sky community and was a 2021 Golden Kite finalist for picture book text.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Laura Watkins

Laura Watkins has illustrated international children's books, designed greeting cards, painted murals, and worked in art galleries. She is the winner of the Northern Illustration Prize. Laura lives in London with her Red Setters, pens, pencils, and chocolate.

ACTIVITIES

This guide for *One Small Thing* is designed for kindergarten through third grade. The activities may be adapted to fit the needs and abilities of each student/child.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION

Explore the Book

Before reading *One Small Thing*, look at the front cover and the title page.

- Describe what you see.
- What do you think the story is about? What clues do you see?

Now look at the copyright and dedication pages.

- Describe what you see.
- How does the illustration here compare with the cover?

Read or listen to *One Small Thing*.

- What is the one small thing each animal does?
- What did the animals realize in the end?

Who created *One Small Thing*?

- Who is the author?
- Who is the illustrator?
- What kind of work did each of them do to make the book?



WRITING ACTIVITY

Busy Beaver and Similes

Many people use the phrase “busy beaver” or “busy as a beaver.” Why do you think people describe a beaver as “busy”? (Beavers spend a lot of time cutting down trees, making their food piles, and building their dams and lodges.)

“Busy as a beaver” is a simile, a comparison using “like” or “as.”

Ask the students if they think Beaver could be described as a “busy beaver.” Ask them to write a page about why they think Beaver could be described as busy. Have them use other similes in their writing.

LISTENING AND ACTING ACTIVITIES

How Badger Found Cricket

To find Cricket in Brightly Wood, Badger had to listen very carefully because there were lots of sounds in the wood.

Have students close their eyes and listen like Badger. Play a recording of nature sounds (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAaAZdVeoRU> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXEnjJsXw8g>) while one student makes cricket sounds very quietly from a part of the room. Have them point (eyes still closed) to where they think the “cricket” is. When three students have identified the “cricket,” give someone else a chance to make cricket sounds.

Act It Out

Have students think of other ways the animals could help Raccoon. Have them act out their ideas in front of the class.

MATHEMATICS

MAZE ACTIVITY

A Brightly Wood Maze

Have students use a pencil to lead Badger through the Brightly Wood maze to Cricket.



ADDITION

Cricket Chirp Calculations

Badger had to listen to find Cricket, but he could have also figured out the air temperature by counting Cricket's chirps! Crickets move slower in cooler temperatures because their body temperature depends on the temperature of their environment. As crickets warm, they can rub their wings together faster, and that's what makes their chirping sound.

The relationship between crickets chirping and air temperature has been known for a long time. According to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, you can count the number of chirps in 15 seconds, add 40, and that will give you the temperature in Fahrenheit (F). The "cricket chirp thermometer" is only accurate down to about 55 degrees.

1. If you count 18 chirps in 15 seconds, what's the temperature? (58°F)
2. If you count 23 chirps in 15 seconds, what's the temperature? (63°F)
3. If you count 31 chirps in 15 seconds, what's the temperature? (71°F)

MULTIPLICATION

Cricket Jumping Calculations

Cricket jumped far away when lightning struck Raccoon's home—all the way to the deepest part of Brightly Wood. He probably thought he could hide there. We don't know if a real cricket could jump that far, but crickets do jump high and far.

Exactly how far a cricket jumps depends on what species it is. Generally, in one leap, crickets can move up to 20 or 30 times their body length. Common field and house crickets are usually 1 to 2 inches long, depending on the species, so they can jump about 3 feet.

1. If a cricket is 1 inch long and can move 20 times its body length, how far can it jump? (20 inches.)
2. If a cricket is 2 inches long and can move 20 times its body length, how far can it jump? (40 inches.)

DIVISION

Thunderstorm and Lightning Math

Trees can often be destroyed by lightning strikes. When lightning hits a tree, it usually travels just below the tree's bark where there is a layer of sap and water. This layer becomes instantly heated and expands, causing the bark to be blasted off the tree and sometimes splitting the wood. That must have been frightening for Raccoon!

Lightning travels at the speed of light, which is 186,000 miles per second. That's *really* fast! So we see lightning almost exactly when it happens. You can estimate how many miles away a storm is by counting the number of seconds between the flash of lightning and the sound of thunder. Every 5 seconds between when you see lightning and when you hear the thunder is one mile. If you count 10 seconds between the lightning flash and thunder, the lightning struck 2 miles away.

1. If you count 15 seconds from the lightning flash to the thunderclap, how many miles away is the lightning? ($15 \div 5 = 3$ miles)
2. If you count 5 seconds from the lightning flash to the thunderclap, how many miles away is the lightning? ($5 \div 5 = 1$ mile)

SCIENCE

ANIMAL RESEARCH

These are the Brightly Wood woodland and meadow creatures featured in *One Small Thing*:



Raccoon



Squirrel



Mouse



Beaver



Badger



Cricket



Rabbit

Research Project

Assign each student or pair of students one of the animals in *One Small Thing* to research on the internet or with library books.

Ask them to gather this information:

- Type of animal
- Where the animal lives
- What the animal eats
- Two interesting facts about the animal
- Three words to describe the animal
- Draw a picture of the animal

Students can make a poster or a book with the animal image and information.

Matching Game - Animal Tracks

The animals in *One Small Thing* walked back home when they thought they couldn't help Raccoon. If you needed to find them, how would you do that?

Let's track them! Raccoon too.



Answer key: 1-C, 2-E, 3-D, 4-F, 5-B, 6-A

THUNDERSTORM ACTIVITIES

Discuss: What Is Lightning?

Lightning is what began the story of *One Small Thing*, when it struck Raccoon's home and burned it down. Explain that lightning is a giant spark of electricity in the atmosphere between clouds, air, and ground.

Let's Make Lightning!

Materials:

- Fluorescent light bulb
- Balloon

Directions:

1. Blow up the balloon and tie off the end.
2. Rub the balloon vigorously on your hair for 10–15 seconds. This will charge the balloon with static.
3. Hold the statically charged balloon against the two metal electrode prongs on the bottom of the light bulb.
4. Turn all the lights off in the room or step into a dark closet. The space should be as dark as possible. The bulb will light up!

What's Happening?

When you rub the balloon on your hair, the balloon builds up an electrical charge—static electricity. When you touch the charged balloon to the end of the fluorescent light bulb, it causes the electrical charge to jump from the balloon to the bulb. The light bulb lights up because the negative charges from the balloon jump across the air and connect with the positive charges inside the light bulb.

As a thunderstorm develops, the clouds become charged with electricity. When the voltage becomes high enough for electricity to leap across the air from one place to another, lightning flashes

THUNDERSTORM SAFETY

Discuss Safety Tips

Indoor safety tips:

- Avoid water. Don't wash dishes, shower, and or go swimming.
- Why? Water can conduct electricity.
- Don't touch electronic equipment or anything connected to an electrical outlet.
- Why? Wires can conduct electricity.
- Stay away from windows, doors, and porches.
- How your house is built and how it is "grounded" affects how dangerous these things might be in a lightning storm. But it's always best to be safe.
- Outdoor safety tips:
- Go indoors! Remember the phrase "When thunder roars, go indoors."

Make a Poster

Choose one of the above safety tips to make a poster about, drawing pictures and highlighting the tip.

ANIMAL ARCHITECT - HOW TO BUILD A BEAVER LODGE

Discuss Beavers and How They Build

Luckily, Raccoon had a good friend who knew all about building houses—Beaver.

Beavers are some of the best animal architects. An architect is someone who designs and builds things, and beavers are experts at designing and building their homes. They can change their environment and their home to suit their needs.

Beavers build dams so they have a safe pond where they can build their home. A beaver's home is usually called a lodge. Beavers build a lodge as a safe shelter from weather and predators. In the real world, beavers can cut trees, build dams, and construct lodges. They use twigs, sticks, rocks, and mud. In *One Small Thing*, Beaver even built a new home for Raccoon.

Sticks and mud are used for building the lodge and the dam that blocks the stream. The lodge is a cozy place to spend winters. The house Beaver built for Raccoon isn't in the pond because raccoons don't live in ponds, but it will still be cozy for the winter.

Do you remember what kind of trees Beaver used for Raccoon's house? (Willow)

Beavers like to use willows as well as maple trees. Their strong teeth and jaws chew and gnaw, so they can cut down trees. They can haul the cut branches into a stream and stick them in the ground. They use their paws to squish mud between the logs. Then they whack the logs and mud with their tail to make sure everything is sturdy.

Beavers design their homes with these features: two entrances so they can escape from predators, a food pile near one entrance, a food ledge where they can store their food inside the lodge, and an air vent to help keep the lodge cool on hot summer days.

Create a Beaver Lodge!

Let's create a beaver lodge! (Younger kids might find it helpful to work in pairs.) When designing your lodge, remember to have two entrances, a food ledge for food, and an air vent.

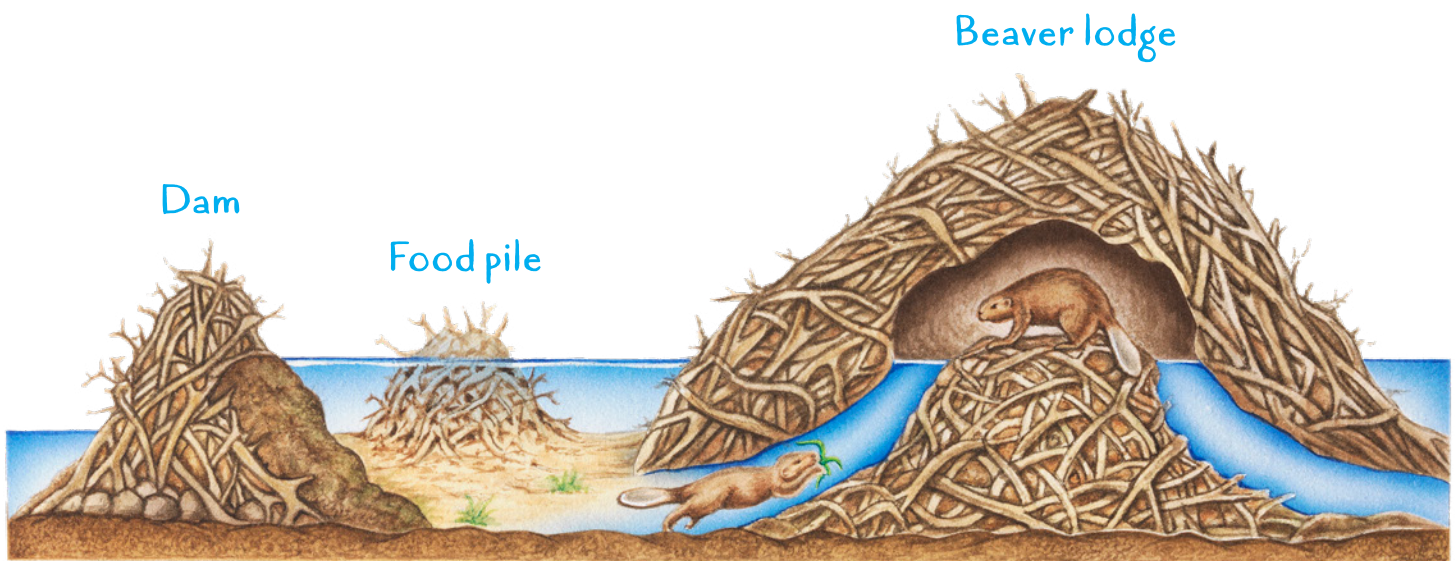
Materials:

- Large sheet of newspaper, wax paper, or aluminum foil
- Plastic bin
- Water (enough to fill the container about 3 inches)
- Rocks (about 10 small rocks)
- Play-dough or clay (2-4 cups)
- If using natural outdoor materials: Small sticks, bark, handfuls of leaves
- If using items from around the house: Straws, toothpicks, popsicle craft sticks, blocks, twist ties, plastic utensils, aluminum foil, etc.
- Tools like spoons or trowels to build with. You can also use your hands.



Directions:

1. Build the dam first. Arrange the materials to build a dam across the bottom of the plastic bin. Use rocks to anchor it to the bottom. Shape the dam like a broad wall, nearly as high as the bin. Leave space on both sides of the dam.
2. Test the dam by tilting the plastic bin slightly and pouring water on the uphill side of the dam. Does any water flow to the downhill side? If so, you may wish to change your design a bit.
3. If the dam leaks too much, improve it. If the dam doesn't seal perfectly, don't worry. Beaver dams don't completely stop the river from flowing.
4. Now build your beaver lodge on the large sheet of paper or foil.
5. Build the walls of your lodge around an object like a rock or an upside-down cup. You can remove that object later, leaving a hollow space inside the lodge.
6. Build a structure with sticks and bark in the shape of a cone that is propped on the rock.
7. Layer other materials onto the lodge however you like. Use lots of clay or play-dough to hold your lodge together.
8. Let the clay or play-dough dry about 4 hours in the sun before picking up the lodge or it will collapse. When you pick up the lodge carefully, you will leave the rock or cup behind.
9. Place your lodge in the bin behind the dam. Remember that the entrances are below water so predators can't reach the young.
10. Add water to the plastic bin until the water level is almost at the top of the dam.



HOW TO GROW AN HERB GARDEN LIKE MOUSE

Learn about Herbs

Herbs have been used in healing for a very long time, perhaps as long as 60,000 years!

In *One Small Thing*, Mouse loves growing things, like herbs. The author has not mentioned the type of herbs Mouse grows, but the illustrator shows Mouse growing peppermint, rosemary, thyme, and basil. All of these herbs are edible, or safe to eat. (Never taste an herb without knowing exactly what it is and if it is safe.)

One herb that is used for burns is aloe vera. It may be the easiest herb to use as it can be put directly on the burn. Chamomile has also been used. Perhaps Squirrel's chamomile tea could have been put on Raccoon's burns. Peppermint and thyme, which Mouse grew, have been known to help with burns too, but Mouse would have to know how to prepare those so they could be used safely on the skin.

Grow Your Own Herb Garden

Try growing your own classroom herb garden. Have the children think about these things:

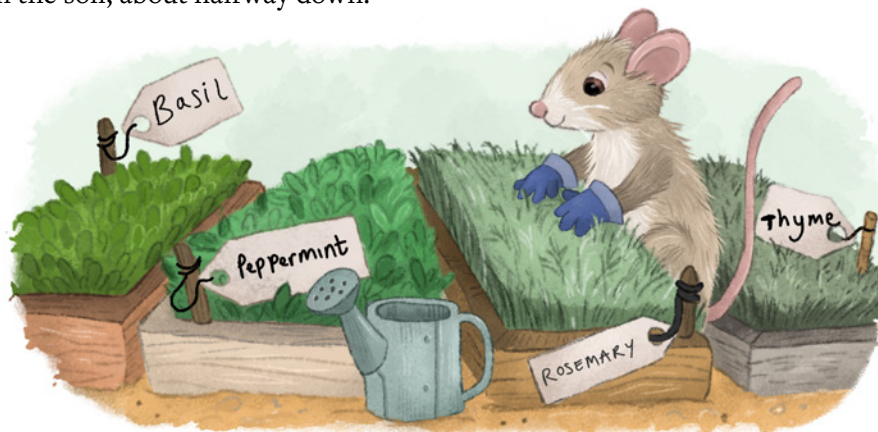
- Estimate how long it will take your plants to grow.
- Predict what your plants will look like when fully grown.
- What color do you think your plants will be?
- What herbs have you eaten in your home?
- Should you start your plants from seeds or from tiny plants? Some herbs, like rosemary, take a long time to grow. Basil and peppermint take less than a month.

You will need:

- Herbs (Try some of Mouse's herbs—basil, rosemary, peppermint, thyme.)
- Gallon milk carton
- Cookie sheet or tray with sides
- Scissors
- Soil
- Pencil and paper

Directions:

1. Clean an empty milk carton. Allow it to dry.
2. Lay the carton on its side. Help children cut the carton in half.
3. Use the scissors to poke a few holes in the bottom of the carton. Help younger children.
4. Place the cookie sheet or tray under the carton. The side with the holes should touch the tray.
5. Fill the carton nearly to the top with soil.
6. Poke four holes in the soil, about halfway down.
7. Place the herbs in the holes. Label each one.
8. Lightly water the soil.
9. Place the tray with the herbs in a sunny spot.
10. Touch the soil each day and water if it feels dry.
11. Keep a plant journal to show how your plants are growing.
12. Enjoy watching your herbs grow!



JOIN SQUIRREL FOR TEA TIME!

Discuss the Origin of Tea and Tea Ceremonies

The story of tea begins in ancient China. According to legend, in 2737 BCE, Shen Nung, a Chinese emperor, was sitting beneath a tree. His servant was boiling drinking water when leaves from the tree blew into the water. Shen Nung wanted to try this infusion of leaves in boiling water. He found it delicious.

Tea drinking was popular in ancient China as tea was regarded as one of the seven daily necessities. Tea came to Japan from China in the eighth century. Tea ceremonies are very important in both Japan and China.

To learn more about tea ceremonies, you can visit:

<https://the.republicoftea.com/tea-culture/how-to-host-a-japanese-tea-ceremony>

<https://www.byfood.com/blog/culture/ultimate-guide-to-japanese-tea-ceremony>

In *One Small Thing*, Squirrel loves tea. He knows all his friends' favorites: chamomile for Raccoon, ginger and mint for Rabbit, jasmine for Mouse, Earl Grey for Badger, and honey for Beaver.

If you want to try a tea ceremony for students/children, you might act as the person doing the ceremony. Tea ceremonies can take from twenty minutes to four hours, but you can do a short one! For children, a good tea to try is Rooibos tea. It has no caffeine. Chamomile, ginger, mint, and honey are also considered caffeine free. You can also use apple juice or orange juice as a substitute for tea.

Hold Your Own Classroom Tea Ceremony

1. Teacher/person leading the ceremony greets everyone with a silent bow.
2. Take off shoes before going to the area (possibly a classroom gathering rug) for the ceremony.
3. Have the students be seated in kneeling positions. If it is too difficult to kneel the entire time, they might kneel before they drink their "tea."
4. Clean the utensils in order.
5. Make the tea or pour the juice as you are able or wish to. Use loose-leaf tea and an infuser or strainer if you choose to use tea. Make the tea in a bowl as would be done in a tea ceremony, and allow one of the children to drink from the bowl as the most important guest. (You can draw the name of this child from a hat.)
6. The child, or important guest, raises the bowl as a mark of respect to the teacher, the tea master. (At a real tea ceremony, the bowl is passed from guest to guest for the tea to be tasted. In the classroom, of course, each child will have their own cup.)
7. The person leading the tea ceremony can symbolically purify the tea bowl and other tea things. Then you can put tea leaves or powder in the tea bowl, using an infuser, if you wish. Mix the tea with hot water, then a whisk.



Here are a few things used in tea ceremonies, some of which you might be able to use:

- **Tea infuser** – strainer that allows you to steep full-leaf tea.
- **Tea bowl** – In a tea ceremony, people drink tea out of bowls instead of cups. Some bowls that people use are over 400 years old.
- **Tea scoop** – A scoop is a kind of spoon made from bamboo. They are used to put loose-leaf tea into the tea bowl.
- **Whisk** – A whisk is like a brush made from bamboo, used to mix tea.
- **Napkin** – A napkin called a fukusa is a special square cloth made out of silk. It is used to symbolically purify the tea scoop and tea caddy.

NATURE OBSERVATION

Walking through the woods can be fun. You can see and hear lots of animals and other natural wonders. Badger walked through the darkest part of Brightly Wood to find Cricket. For your observation, find a sunny spot, perhaps in a meadow or open area, like where we first met the animals of *One Small Thing*.

Make Your Own Nature Observation Journal

- Gather together 8 pieces of paper. Some can be lined for writing, some blank for drawing.
- Add a piece of blank or colored paper for the cover.
- Line up the papers. Punch three holes through all the pieces of paper.
- Use yarn or string to weave through the holes to hold the notebook together.
- Decorate the cover, using *One Small Thing* as inspiration. For example, choose an animal from *One Small Thing*. Think of how the animal would decorate the cover. Perhaps choose his or her favorite things.
- You may want to take a piece of cardboard along on your walk, or something else thick to place your notebook on to write on.

Observe and Share

- Find a quiet spot to sit outside where you can observe. Have your Nature Observation Journal and something to write and draw with.
- Sit for 15 minutes or so.
- Be aware of what is around you. Use your senses (except for taste). What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? What do you smell?
- Find something you want to write about or draw. Write/draw it in your Nature Observation Journal.
- Sit in this same spot, 15 minutes a day, for a whole week. Notice if something changes. Is the weather different? Are different birds visiting? Write and draw about it.
- Share your journal with your class. What interested you most?
- Which animal in *One Small Thing* would have a hard time sitting still? Which would have the easiest time?



SOCIAL STUDIES

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Discussion Questions



- How did each animal feel when they learned about what happened to Raccoon?
- Why didn't the animals help Raccoon right away? What were their excuses?
- Which animal felt overwhelmed? (Squirrel)
- Squirrel felt so sad, he couldn't move. Do you ever feel overwhelmed like Squirrel did? Do you ever feel there is too much to be fixed or it's so hard or sad you may as well give up?
- Which animal wanted to shift responsibility to someone else because they thought someone else would help? (Rabbit)
- Rabbit said he didn't know Raccoon very well and thought someone else would surely help. Do you ever feel like something isn't your responsibility, so you don't help? Do you ever think you don't know someone well enough to help?
- Which animal felt they didn't have anything to offer, that there was nothing they could do? (Mouse)
- Mouse felt the problem was so big and he and his friends were so small. Do you ever feel like that?
- What are other ways you feel when something bad happens?
- What makes you feel better when you are sick or sad?

Do Your Own One Small Thing

Brainstorm:

- Think of one small thing you can do at home to help your family.
- Think of one small thing you can do at school to be a good citizen.
- Think of one small thing you can do to help a friend.

Draw a picture of you doing your one small thing.

Cooperation Game

The animals in *One Small Thing* worked individually to come to Raccoon's aid. This worked out well for them—and Raccoon. However, they could have also worked as a team. Working as a team often achieves good results in a timely manner.

Cooperative Hoops is a twist on the game Musical Chairs. In Musical Chairs each player competes for themselves and excludes others in order to win. In Cooperative Hoops cooperation makes the win.

How to Play:

- Scatter hula hoops around the play area.
- Play music.
- Have the children dance and move around the hoops, but not inside them. The children must not stop moving while the music is playing.
- When the music stops, they must have at least one foot inside a hula hoop and not touch the ground outside the hula hoop.
- On each rotation, remove a ring so the children must share hula hoops.
- When there are only two hula hoops left, the winners are the group with the most people inside one hula hoop.

This game encourages children to cooperate to help each other to win.