

These beautifully illustrated, double-sided wooden puzzles offer an engaging and playful way to introduce young children to bugs and their habitats. The set includes four two-piece puzzles, each featuring a chunky animal piece that fits snugly into a related habitat base, making completion by little hands easy and satisfying.

Snug as a bug

As an introduction for very young children, these wonderfully tactile puzzles can simply be set up on a nature-themed playmat with some of the pieces standing up and some lying down.



- Give the child time to experiment with and investigate the pieces at their own pace. This will enhance independent learning and fine motor skills as they discover how to turn the pieces to fit them into their related other part. This is also important for strengthening hand-to-eye coordination and spatial awareness skills.
- Allow the child the time and freedom to handle and explore the puzzles: noticing the different shapes, feeling the edges, surfaces and holes, and observing the charming illustrations on both sides of the pieces. This exploration boosts spatial representation skills and helps to develop a visual and tactile experience of shape, sorting, ordering, comparing, patterns, differences, and similarities.

- If the child is struggling, gently take a piece that they are not using and demonstrate how to fit it with its partner piece. Provide a running commentary, keeping language and instructions at a level that matches their age and understanding. For young children, this may be as simple as 'Turn it like this,' or, for a more knowledgeable child, 'Look it's a spider, he lives in the web... like this.'

Hands-on exploring

The puzzles are perfect for supporting early mathematical understanding, spatial awareness, and schematic play.

- Use mathematical language, including 'match', 'sort', 'different', 'same', 'too big', 'too small', 'shape', 'size', 'corners', 'points', and 'circular', plus adjectives such as 'flat', 'smooth', 'bumpy', 'spiky', and 'curved'.
- Introduce prepositional language and key spatial concepts, including 'under', 'behind', 'on', 'in', 'upside down', and 'wrong way up', and rotation verbs such as 'twist', 'flip', 'turn', 'spin', 'rotate', and 'balance'. Using hand gestures to emphasize these words helps children to connect the word to the physical action and develops their spatial thinking.



- Visualization – imagining and manipulating an object in your head – is an important problem-solving and spatial reasoning skill. Encourage the development of this skill by placing an animal piece in a habitat piece in which it doesn't fit or isn't lined up correctly. Ask the child to explain why it isn't fitting, where they think it might fit or what needs to be done to make it fit. They can then check their predictions with the piece to see if they have visualized it correctly.
- Verbalize the outcome to consolidate the learning, for example 'I tried to put the butterfly in the honeycomb, but it was the wrong shape. The butterfly is a smooth circle shape, and the honeycomb has lots of straight sides and corners.'
- Many children will love the schematic nature of repeatedly placing the animals in and out of their homes, lining them up in rows or stacking them. Allow them the freedom to satisfy these schemas as many times as they wish.

'Order is one of the needs of life, which when it is satisfied, produces a real happiness.' *Maria Montessori*

Who goes there?

Who's Hiding? is perfect for a game of hide-and-seek! The outer piece of the puzzles shows the same habitat on both sides, while the inner piece depicts the animal linked to the habitat on one side, with the reverse showing the missing part of the habitat artwork.



- Set up the puzzles so that all the inner pieces have the animals facing down, leaving their habitat uppermost.
- Explain to the child that you need their help to find some animals that are playing hide-and-seek.
- Model descriptive and new vocabulary by asking questions:
 - 'Ooh, look... a glossy green leaf! What do you think might be hiding under here?'
 - 'Here's some golden honeycomb oozing honey. What do you think has made the honey?'
- Children will delight in having a guess and seeking out the hidden occupant.
- Encourage further investigation and observation by looking for details in the illustrations: counting legs, naming body parts, and identifying colors.

Tell me a story

The chunky nature of the pieces allows them to stand upright, which is a great invitation for some rich storytelling and new language play.

- Set up the pieces among additional props to encourage creative thinking and spark imagination. Log slices, wooden blocks, caves, pebbles, leaves, flowers, and tree stumps will complement the set beautifully. Allow the child the freedom to explore and take the play in whatever direction their imagination leads them.



- Find suitable pauses in their play to extend their vocabulary and encourage further ideas using the following:
 - **Open-ended questions:** 'Who did you find?', 'Where was he hiding?', 'Why do you think...?', 'What was he doing?'
 - **Expanding on ideas:** 'Was she hiding from the spider? Where could she hide now?'
 - **Narrating play:** 'I'm calling my bee 'Mr Honey', and he's buzzing off to find a friend to go on an adventure with!'
 - **Introducing new vocabulary:** "Mrs Butterfly is looking for some sweet, tasty nectar. Look underneath this piece. Can you see the stamens? She might find some there!'
 - If the child seems unsure or is reluctant to join in, you could engage them by reenacting your story with the pieces: 'Hello, little ladybird! Where are you going? Oh, you're looking for some aphids to eat, are you? Ooh, she's snuffling around the spider's web! No luck? Why don't you try the flower. I often find aphids on my flowers!'
- You could pretend the animals are looking for food, going on holiday together, looking for a lost friend, pretending they don't know which home is theirs and trying to fit in the wrong one, playing hide-and-seek, or waking up in their homes, having an adventure, and returning to sleep. Anything goes!
- If children become engaged and offer ideas and suggestions, take their lead with enthusiasm and praise, which will build their confidence and encourage independent play.

Rhyme time

The power of a rhythmic, repetitive singing session should never be underestimated. It can boost language development, particularly introducing new vocabulary. Incorporating actions stimulates both hemispheres of the brain, which turns spatial concepts of shape and space into a physical experience. Use the animals and complementary resources as props for an engaging sing-along:



- Try using 'Incy Wincy Spider' as an example. Point to specific items as you sing the rhyme to link words to meaning. You could pause at the end of a line and let the children fill in the missing word. They will love reenacting the rhymes and seeing the song unfold in front of them. Use your liveliest sing-song voice and whole-body gestures. They will soon be singing along and building new vocabulary without even realizing!
- Change the words of 'Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, touch the ground' for each animal: Butterfly, butterfly flutter around. Butterfly, butterfly, touch the ground. Butterfly, butterfly, fly so free. Butterfly, butterfly, land on me. Butterfly, butterfly, reach the sky. Butterfly, butterfly, say goodbye.'
- Place the animal back into its habitat.
- Encourage children to join in and use the animals to perform the actions.

Who am I?

- Hide one of the pieces under a cloth or behind a book and keep looking at it using descriptive words to describe it – 'It's red, has black spots on its back and six black legs'. Can the children guess which bug it is? Once children have understood the concept, they can play it with their friends.

- Use magnifiers to explore the animal characters and their habitats in more detail. Look at markings, how many legs they have, types of skin and fur, what they have used to build their homes, who can fly and who can't.



Shapes and shadows

- Stand the shapes up in a sunny spot or use a torch to discover the shadows they form as the light floods through them. To extend this beautiful STEM activity you could cover the shapes with tissue paper for colorful shadow play.
- Hold the outer shapes up to the sky and talk about what you can see through the shapes. Can you see a circle-shaped cloud? Make sure to avoid looking directly at the sun.



Books on garden bugs

Bugs and Insects (Usborne Spotter's Guide)
by Anthony Wootton

RSPB's My First Book of Garden Bugs
by Mike Unwin

Spinderella by Julia Donaldson

That's Not My Bee... by Fiona Watt

The Bad-Tempered Ladybird by Eric Carle

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle



Get talking – useful words

- Bee, honeycomb, honey, ladybird/bug, leaf, butterfly, flower, spider, web
- Home, habitat, hiding, garden, hive, nectar, stamen, silk
- Fly, crawl, buzz
- Wings, legs, antenna, antennae, abdomen, thorax, spots, stripes
- Hide, in, inside, on, on top, under, underneath, besides, behind, upside down, wrong way up
- Sort, match, size, shape, fit, same, sides, edges, points, corners, circular, different, opposite, too big, too small
- Bumpy, spiky, curved, flat, smooth
- Twist, flip, turn, spin, rotate, balance.