

4th GRADE STATE WINNER

Down in the Dirt!

By Nurit Neta

Irela Perez, Teacher | Visalia Montessori School
TULARE COUNTY

Illustrated by: Millikan High School

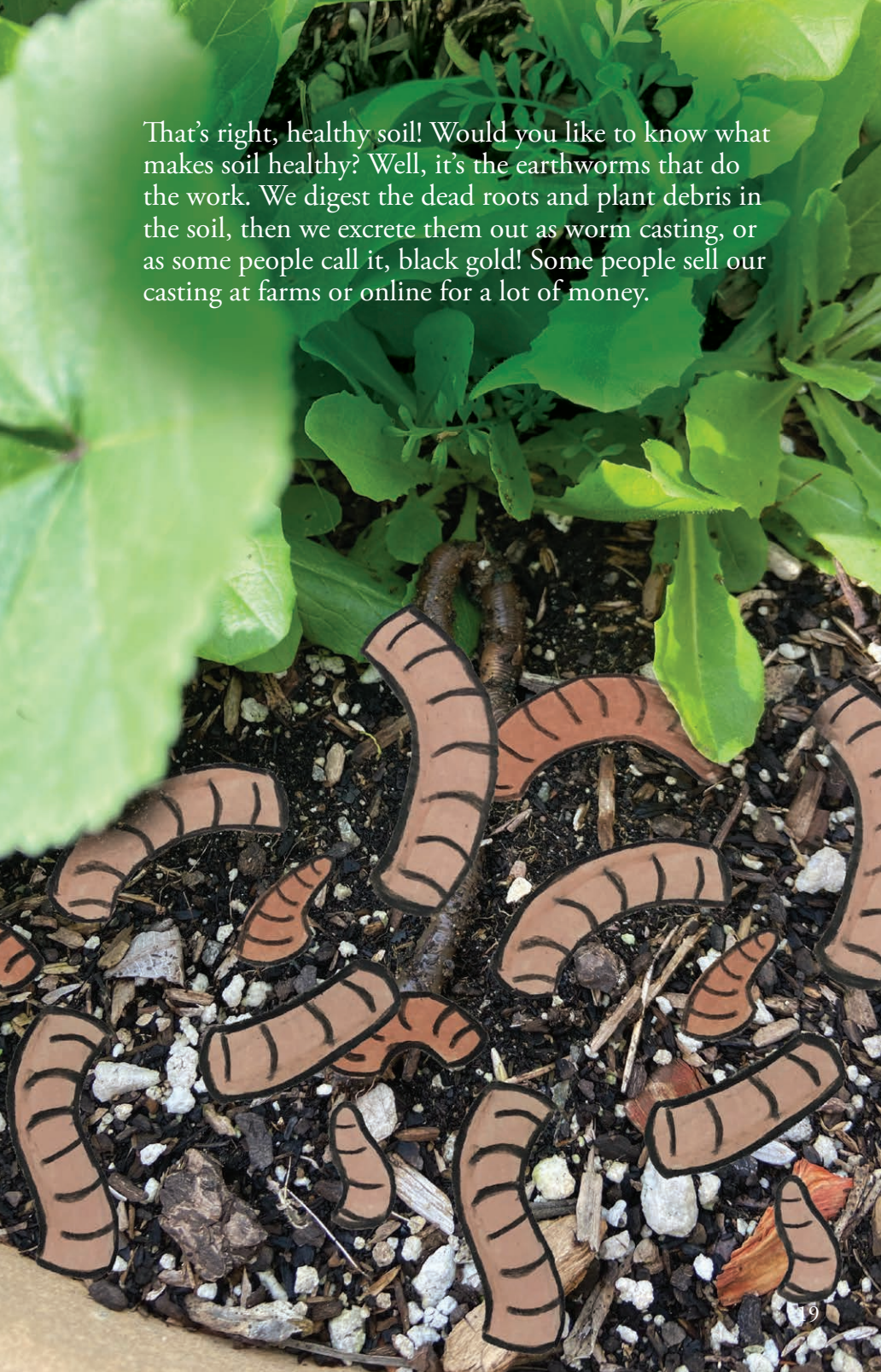


Hello there! Do you not see me? Come closer, even closer than that! Do you see me now? Now that you see me, let's have a proper introduction.

My name is Elli, and I am an earthworm. You might be a little scared or grossed out by me, but I hope you change your mind after you learn a little more about us. I live in a garden with a lot of healthy soil.



That's right, healthy soil! Would you like to know what makes soil healthy? Well, it's the earthworms that do the work. We digest the dead roots and plant debris in the soil, then we excrete them out as worm casting, or as some people call it, black gold! Some people sell our casting at farms or online for a lot of money.





Our casting helps gardens and crops grow by adding nutrients to the soil, which makes the soil healthier, which means healthy produce!



Some of these products are beets, broccoli, and even big peach and nectarine trees. Produce gets shipped to markets around the country, but it is always better to eat the vegetables and fruits that grow close to your hometown.

There are earthworm farms that grow worms and sell their casting or the worms!


I have a cousin that lives on a worm farm, and she enjoys it a lot!

Worm Farm





As I told you before, I live in the garden of a school called Visalia Montessori School, and I really enjoy my time there. The kids at the school often come out to pick the tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and pumpkins and also water the plants or plant new ones.

A photograph of a person with long, dark, wavy hair, seen from the side and back, looking down at a garden. The person is wearing a blue sleeve and a silver bracelet. Their hand is visible, reaching towards the ground. The background is a lush green garden with various plants and soil. In the bottom right corner, there is a cartoon drawing of a smiling worm with a tuft of dark hair, peeking out from behind a dark mound of earth.

Sometimes the kids
come and dig us up and
hold us up to talk or tell
us funny jokes. I love it
when they do that!
Sometimes the kids
forget to water the
plants or they water
them too much, so the
ground gets too wet or
too dry.

During these times, it is hard to provide the plants with nutrients, so some of these plants die. The other earthworms in the garden and I try our best to save these plants, but sometimes it doesn't work.



So as you can tell, earthworms are very important to the world. Well, now that you know a little more about earthworms, I hope you will rethink your opinion about us. See you next time you dig in the soil!



About the Author



\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\ **Nurit Neta** \\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\ 10 years old

Nurit wants readers to understand the importance of earthworms. At the very least, she wants people to stop being “grossed out” by the creatures. Her favorite part of the writing process was opening the story with an amusing line, delivered by the earthworm itself. Nurit credits her school’s large garden, and the teacher behind it, who happens to be her mother, for giving her the motivation to write about earthworms’ positive impact on the soil, and the things we grow.

About the Illustrators



**Sam Suque, Deema Bah, Maialen Teagle-Alarcon,
Anissa Andrade, Sofia Martin, Sasha Cruz,
Kaylie Pham, (not pictured) Sage Abell**

Millikan High School
Scott Coppenger, Art Teacher

These Los Angeles County high school students had fun! The team of eight Advanced Photography sophomores from Millikan High School in Long Beach also learned a lot while bringing “Down in the Dirt!” to life.

They started the creative process by reading and re-reading the story, to grasp the importance of worms and brainstorm how to sequence the story. Then the fun, or photography, began! They scouted locations, proper scenery, and spots to take pictures. Each student took various photos, and the team choose which photograph worked best to advance the tale. Phones, cameras, and editing tools within Snapchat and Adobe Lightroom were utilized. Finally, the worm character was edited into the photograph.

Thinking outside the box, having artistic freedom, and creatively communicating about a subject such as worms made the experience memorable for all.