

Some things to look for:

Where was the creature found?

Water: in the water, on the water, at the waters edge, near the water, over the water on a leaf, over the water in the air

In the shade: On leaves, under leaves, on the tree, under the tree, in the litter beneath the tree.

Rocks and soil: On the rock, under the rock but on the soil surface, under the rock and under the soil.

Movement: Legs/feet, Wings, Foot (snails or slugs) or like a worm.

Body: How many distinct body pieces 1,2 or 3, more?

Is it obviously segmented?

Does it have an obvious head?

Eyes, how many can you see? Are they on stalks?

Legs/feet, how many? 1,4,6,8, many

If segmented and with legs, are they in pairs with two legs on each side of a segment, or are they single on each side of a segment?

Wings: How many? (2 or 4) Does it have a pair of hard wing cases?

Feel/looks Is it hard /soft, Dry/wet, Hairy/smooth, slimey/not slimey

Feeding What do you think it eats, and why?

Reproduction Eggs, what do they look like, and where did you find them? (

under a stone, in a cocoon, individually, in a nest, in a blob of jelly attached to a plant, attached to a plant individually,

attached to a plant in a raft, as a raft on the surface of water, as a blob of jelly in water with lots of eggs in the blob, as a string of jelly in water, singly in a blob of jelly.)

Are the young to be found with their parent or near the parent, or just in the same habitat as the parent) Do the young look like the parent?

Colour: Is it brightly visible or is it camouflaged? Does it have spots or stripes? Does it have false eyes? Is it white?

This is all off the top of my head, but you can use the above to design a key to identify a minibeast, you can also use such stuff for constructing Ven diagrammes, you can also do a quick numbers or species count using quadrats, comparing different habitats. Which habitat supports most different forms? Which habitat has the greatest number of individuals (that you can see)? You can write about things you find, descriptive writing, how when and where a critter was found, what it looks like, how you caught it. It is good practice to get people to actually describe, be it verbally, in writing, drawing or model making, what they see, not what you or the books tell you they should see, for example it is almost certain that you will find a 7 legged spider.(see below)

Make a spiders web, if you find one, try and follow the pattern, it should be a spiral if one of the garden spiders that catches its insect prey in a web, there are other kinds of webs and other kinds of spiders.

Make a graph of the number of different types on critter found in each of the different habitats you investigate.

Look at relevant literature, both scientific e.g. reference books and CD's (oh yes IT can creep in here too !) and fiction, does the Hungry Caterpillar/Angry Ladybird/Sharlots Web/Frog and Toad are Friends/James and the Giant Peach accurately reflect a creatures habits, feeding, lifestyle etc.

A salutary tale about what a teacher thinks someone should see and what is actually seen.....

Some years back I was building a pond in a school garden (I do quite a lot of this),I used to go into the school one day a week, while building the pond over several weeks. I took a group of children out with me to help and to see the process (for instance I was using electricity to run my electric drill, but as I was in the middle of a field I needed a generator to provide the electricity, which of course needed petrol and so on)

Anyhow, we finished building the pond, so I told the teacher, the next week I came into school and asked to see the work the children had done relating to the building of the pond.

One child came and showed me a picture of the pond teeming with life, all manner of little things swimming about in it, I asked him why he had put all this life in the pond as we had only just finished building it , and I didn't recall seeing ANYTHING in the water.

The child rather bashfully said (pointing at his teach) because SHE TOLD ME to! It turned out the child had drawn a rather good picture of the pond, a circle with some water in it, a generator and a drill nearby, and the teacher had forced him to put all the critters in the pond as her expectation was that the thing would be full of life !

Hope all this helps, if you want anymore ideas, suggestions, just ask.