Night creatures – glow worms

Reading/discussion

Glow worms are not really worms at all. They belong to a family of insects called **Phengodidae** which are beetles. Phengodidae are found in both North and South America. On the right hand side of this reading is a picture of the male glow worm in the adult stage of **metamorphosis**. As you can see, he has a very handsome pair of **antennae** which look something like feathers. He uses these to find the female.

The adult female glow worm just looks like a larger version of the **larva** stage. This is known as **larviform**. In fact, the only real difference between her and the larva is that she is bigger and can lay eggs. Here is a picture of the female glow worm:

On each of the female’s segments there are a pair of special organs called **photic** or **bioluminescent organs** which produce a yellow, orange or green light. They look like shining spots on either side of the body. Because the spots look a little like the windows of a train when it passes by at night, the female glow worms are often called railroad worms.

If you touch a bulb which has been turned on for a while you will find that it is very hot. Most light produces heat, but the glow worm’s light is cold. We would save a lot of energy if we could make bulbs which only produce cold light!

The larvae and female glow worms are **carnivorous**. They are **nocturnal** and live in burrows during the day, at night they emerge to catch and eat millipedes and other small insects which they find in the soil or among the dead leaves on the ground. As far as we know the males do not eat at all and they do not live very long.
Activities:

A. True or False?

How much can you remember about glow worms? See if you can answer the following questions without peeking at the reading. Here are some facts about glow worms – some are true (T) and some are false (F). Can you put a circle around the correct answer?

1. The female glow worm has a pair of feathery antennae. (T) (F)
2. Larviform means that the adult looks the same as the larvae. (T) (F)
3. Glow worms are really beetles. (T) (F)
4. The glow worm’s light makes it feel warm to touch. (T) (F)
5. Glow worms are sometimes called railroad worms because they are often found on the railway tracks. (T) (F)
6. The photic organs on the glow worm produce light. (T) (F)
7. Glow worm larvae are herbivorous. (T) (F)
8. Only the glow worm males eat millipedes. (T) (F)
9. Glow worm larvae and females live in burrows during the day. (T) (F)
10. Glow worms are nocturnal. (T) (F)

B. Creative writing.

Close your eyes and imagine you are walking through a forest at night and all around you are the lights of glow worms flickering in the trees and bushes. It is a strange and beautiful sight. Write a short poem describing what you see. Try to use some of the facts you have learnt about glow worms in your poem.
Answer Sheet

Activity A.

1. The female glow worm has a pair of feathery antennae.  (F)
2. Larviform means that the adult looks the same as the larvae.  (T)
3. Glow worms are really beetles.  (T)
4. The glow worm’s light makes it feel warm to touch.  (F)
5. Glow worms are sometimes called railroad worms because they are often found on the railway tracks.  (F)
6. The photic organs on the glow worm produce light.  (T)
7. Glow worm larvae are herbivorous.  (F)
8. Only the glow worm males eat millipedes.  (F)
9. Glow worm larvae and females live in burrows during the day.  (T)
10. Glow worms are nocturnal.  (T)

Activity B.

This activity draws on the child’s imagination and therefore there are no right or wrong ways to write the poem. However, any details included should be factually correct.