

Is it an Insect?



Elinor and her best friends Ari and Olive are very curious about bugs. They like to observe them through a magnifying glass, so they can see a bug's features up close and determine whether it is an insect or not. When Elinor finds an insect, she likes to draw a picture of it and add it to her Field Guide to Insects.

Explain to your child that an insect is a special kind of bug (not all bugs are insects). An insect has to have: 2 antennae, 6 legs, and 3 body parts (head, thorax, abdomen). Not all bugs have these. For example, an ant is an insect (it has 6 legs, see diagram below), but a spider is not (it has 8 legs).

You can help your child identify an insect by asking three simple questions. A "yes" answer to all three questions tells you it is an insect. Identifying an animal through a series of yes/no questions is called a dichotomous key (see box below). Scientists use dichotomous keys all the time as an identification tool.

Insect Search

On the next page are pictures of different kinds of bugs. Guide your child to pick out the insects by counting the legs, body parts, and antennae. Some may surprise you!

Assemble Elinor's Field Guide

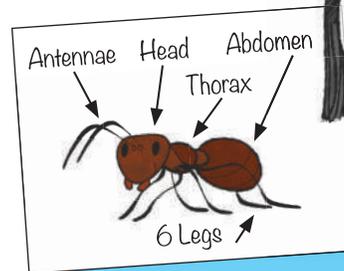
Print out and assemble Elinor's Field Guide to Insects. Follow these steps:

1. Get a three-ring binder or paper folder with fasteners.
2. Print out the cover, the two pages, and a few of the blank "My Insects" pages for your child to add insects to Elinor's field guide.
3. Use a hole punch to put holes in all the pages except the cover.
4. Tape or glue the cover to the front of the binder or folder. Help your child write his name on the line under Elinor's name.
5. Put all the pages into the binder.

Explore and Record

Now that your child knows how to identify an insect and has a field guide to record her findings in, it is time to go on an insect hunt! Insects can be found everywhere — on trees, under things like rocks and logs, floating on water, in the dirt, and in the grass. There are even insects inside your house!

Be sure to take a magnifying glass. Also, remind your child to bring her new field guide so she can draw a picture of each insect she finds. Keep adding more pages to the guide as your child finds more insects.



DICHOTOMOUS KEY: IDENTIFY AN INSECT

- 1) Does it have 6 legs?
 - a. Yes (go to next question)
 - b. No (STOP: it isn't an insect.)
- 2) Does it have 3 body parts?
 - a. Yes (go to next question)
 - b. No (STOP: it isn't an insect)
- 3) Does it have 2 antennae?
 - a. Yes (It is an insect.)
 - b. No (It isn't an insect.)

So, what's an insect? A bug that has 6 legs, 3 body parts, and 2 antennae.



Insect Search



Some of the bugs below are insects and some are not. Help your child identify the insects by using the dichotomous key on the previous page. Then ask your child to put a check mark in the magnifying glass next to each insect.

Ant



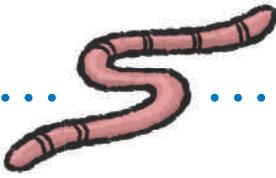
Snail



Dragonfly



Worm



Cricket



Bee



Roly Poly



Spider



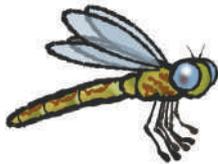


Elinor

Wonders Why



A Field Guide to Insects



By Elinor and

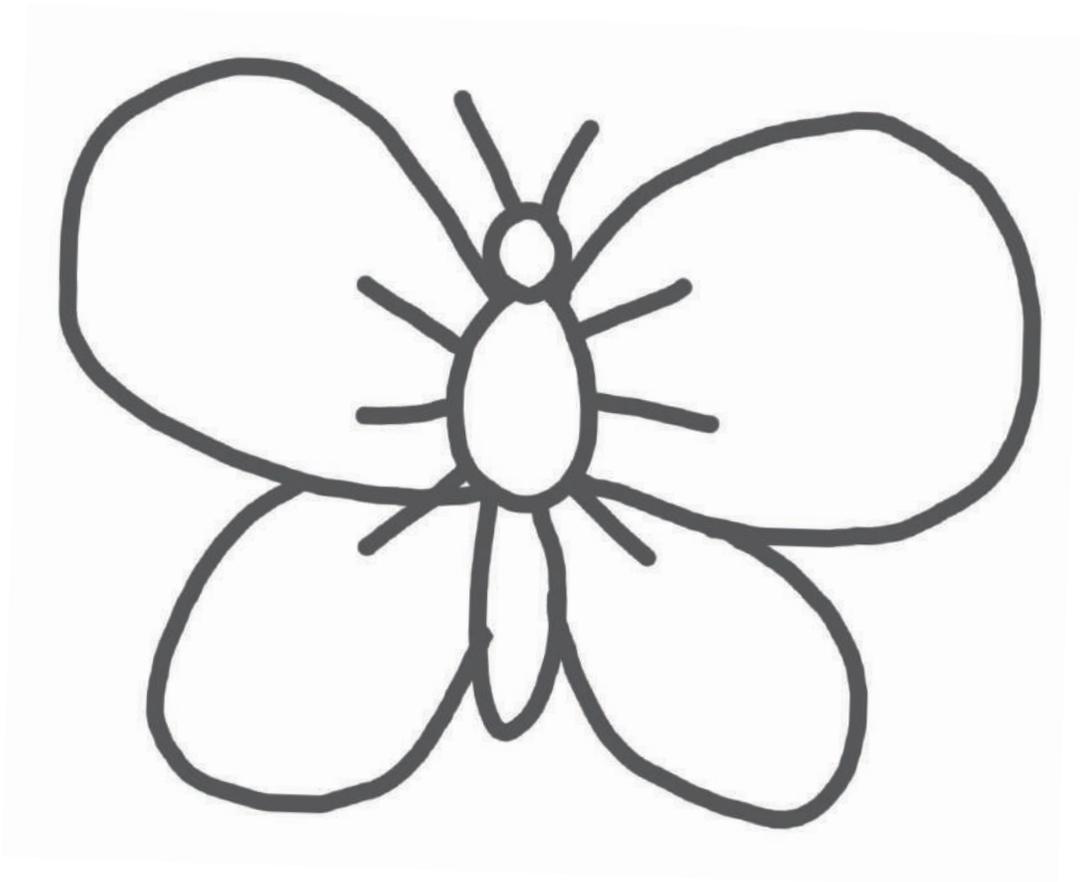


My Insects



Butterfly

Name of insect



Number of legs 6

Number of body parts..... 3

Number of antennae 2

Is it an insect?

Yes

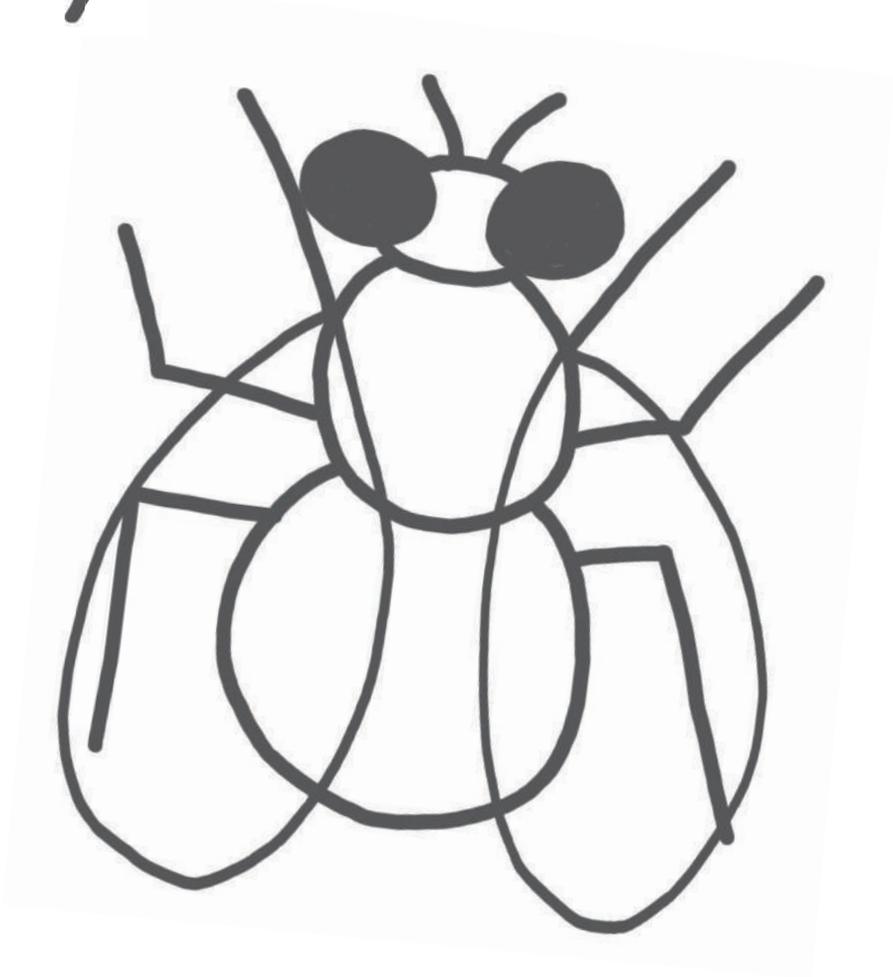
No

My Insects



Fly

Name of insect



Number of legs

6

Number of body parts.....

3

Number of antennae

2

Is it an insect?

Yes

No

My Insects



Name of insect

Number of legs



Number of body parts.....



Number of antennae



Is it an insect?

Yes

No