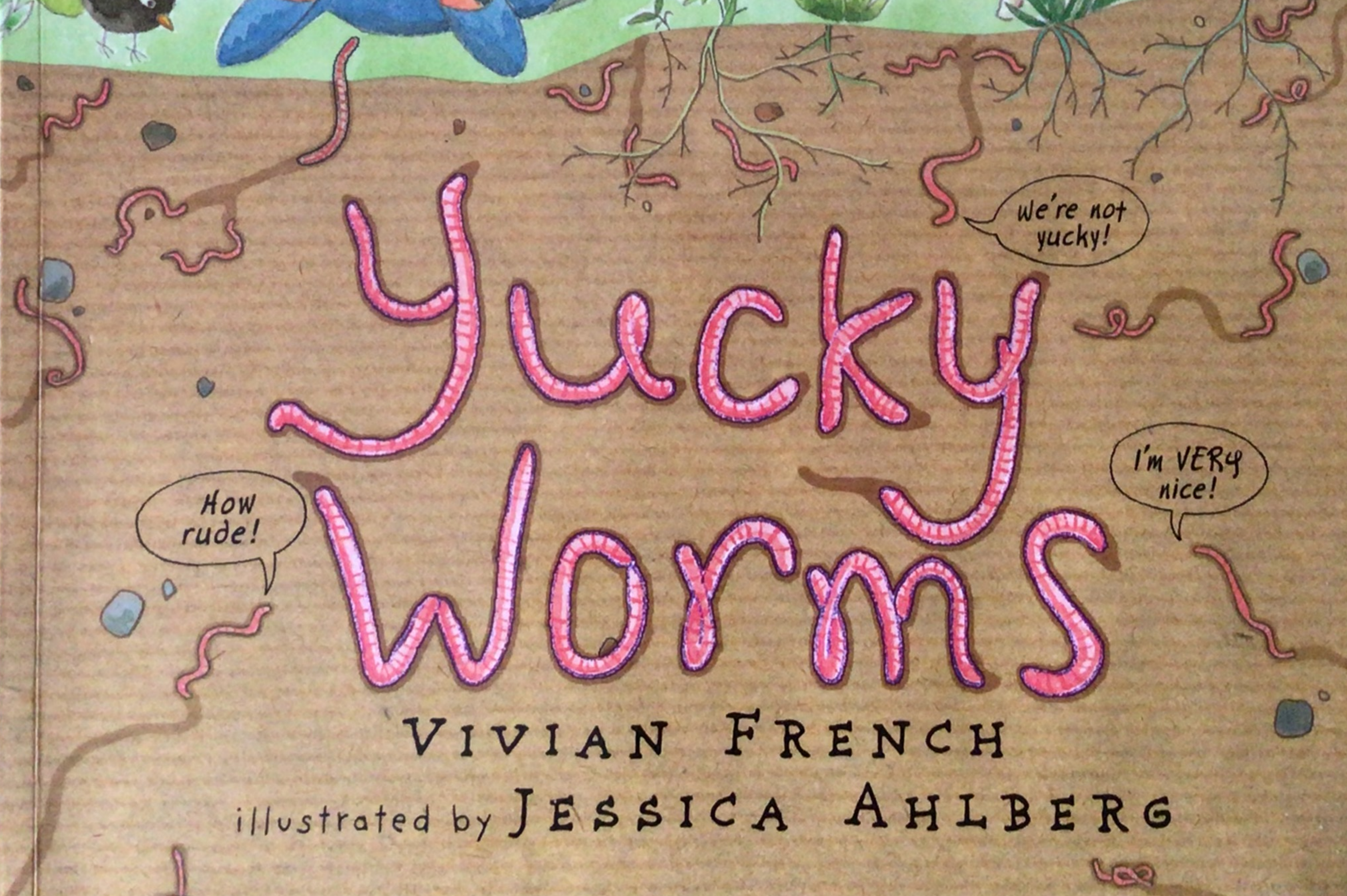




A.M.

C2



How rude!

We're not yucky!

I'm VERY nice!

Yucky Worms

VIVIAN FRENCH

illustrated by JESSICA AHLBERG

One day when I was
in Gran's garden,
Gran dug up a slimy
slithery
wiggly
worm.



"Yuck!" I said. "Throw it away!"
"Throw it away?" Gran looked horrified.
"Would you throw away one of your friends?"
"You can't be friends with a worm," I said.
"You can't even tell which end is which."



"Yes you can! Watch."
Gran put the worm down.

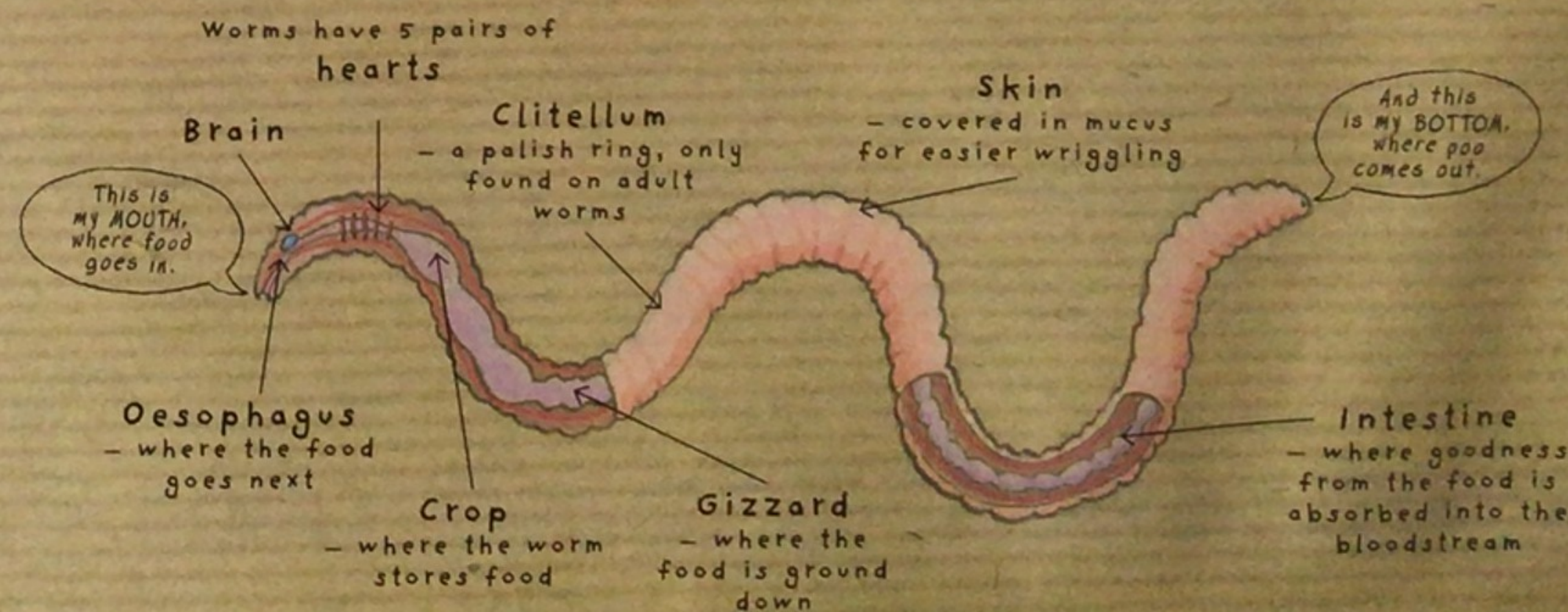
It gave a kind of
squirmy wriggle
and disappeared
really fast,
pointy end first.




As the rounded end vanished,
Gran said, "There goes its tail."
I bent down to look, and I could see
it had left a little tunnel.

"Where's it gone?" I asked.
"Home," Gran said.
"It's an earthworm.
It lives in the earth."

In most gardens
there will be about
20 worms in every
square metre of earth.



The illustration depicts a cross-section of a garden. Above the ground, there are green plants with purple and white flowers, and various insects like bees and beetles. Below the ground, several pink worms are shown in different positions. One worm is on the left, another is in the middle, and a third is on the right. The soil is light brown with small stones and roots. The background is a bright blue sky with small white stars or dust particles.

Mmm, mouldy.

"Does it eat earth too?"

I wanted to know.

"It eats tiny tiny stones and bits of grit,"

Gran told me, "but worms eat other things as well, like rotting leaves and flowers and fruit and dead insects.

They specially like eating at night, when it's cool.

Grit is good for you.

YUCK! Can't eat this.

Worms come above ground to find things to eat too...

Nice and rotten. Just how I like it.

They pull their food back down as they wriggle into the earth again.

The stones and grit help to grind everything up in the worm's stomach, and then the worm poos it back out."

Zzzzz.

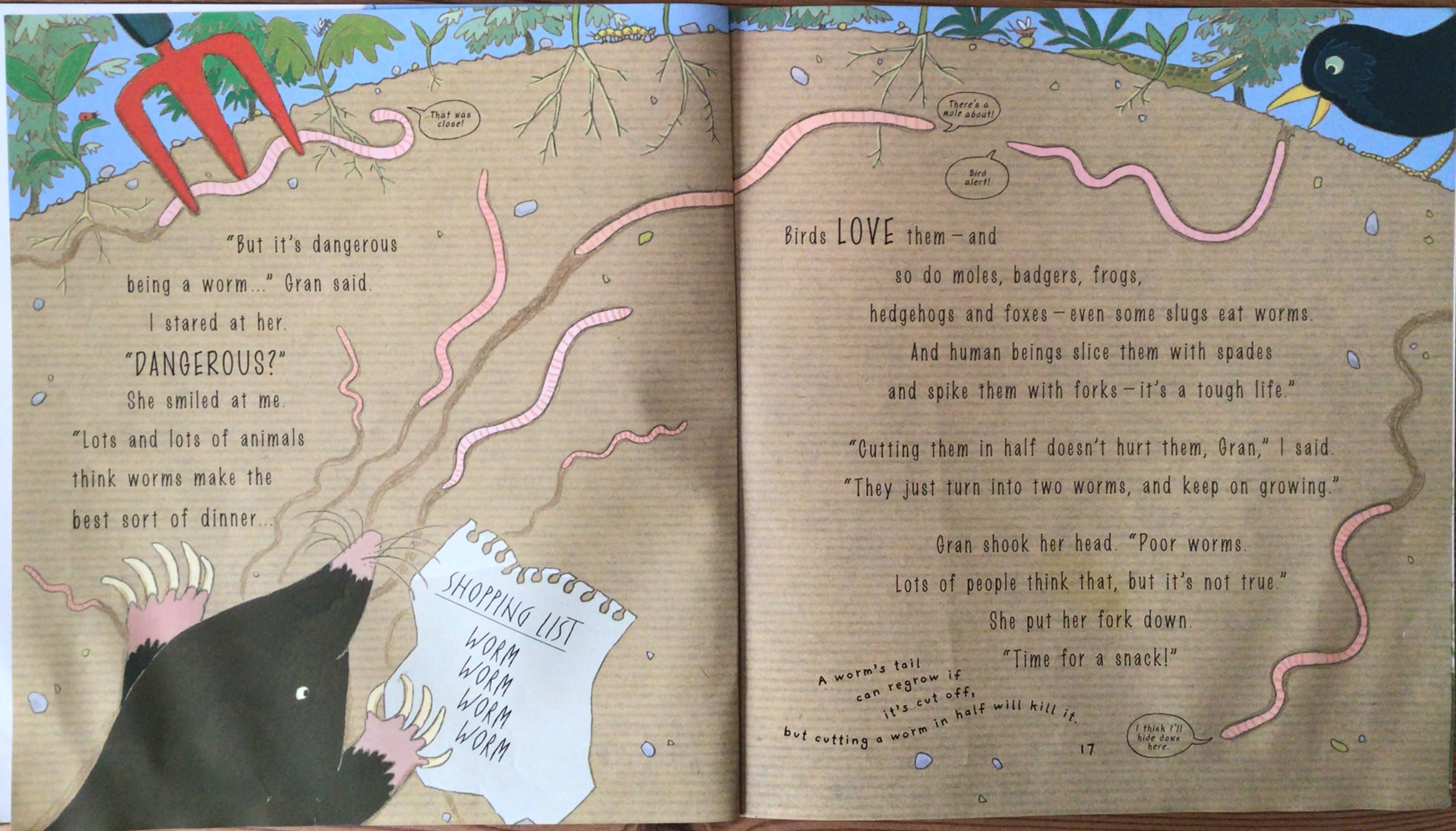


Gran pointed
at the flowerbed.
“LOOK! Can you see?”
I bent down – and I saw a
weird long curly worm made of earth.
“That’s worm poo,” Gran said. “It’s called a cast.
You know when you recycle things? Well, worms
do it too. There’s still a lot of goodness
left in the things a worm eats, and when the
goodness comes out again as poo, it helps
plants to grow **BIG** and **STRONG**.
And as the worms move about, under and over the earth,
the poo gets spread around the garden...



That's why worms are my friends." Gran gave me a thumbs-up. "It's not just their poo that's good for plants. The tunnels they dig loosen the soil - so roots can stretch out and air and rain water can get in."





"But it's dangerous being a worm..." Gran said.

I stared at her. "DANGEROUS?"

She smiled at me.

"Lots and lots of animals think worms make the best sort of dinner..."

That was close!

There's a mole about!

Bird alert!

Birds LOVE them – and

so do moles, badgers, frogs, hedgehogs and foxes – even some slugs eat worms.

And human beings slice them with spades and spike them with forks – it's a tough life."

"Cutting them in half doesn't hurt them, Gran," I said.

"They just turn into two worms, and keep on growing."

Gran shook her head. "Poor worms. Lots of people think that, but it's not true."

She put her fork down.

"Time for a snack!"

A worm's tail can regrow if it's cut off, but cutting a worm in half will kill it.

I think I'll hide down here.

Gran had tea, and I had orange juice.
"Can I dig a worm up?" I asked.
"If it rains," Gran said, "the worms
will come up on their own."

Worms breathe through their skins.
They don't mind the earth around them
being wet, but if their tunnels are flooded,
they come up to the surface to breathe.

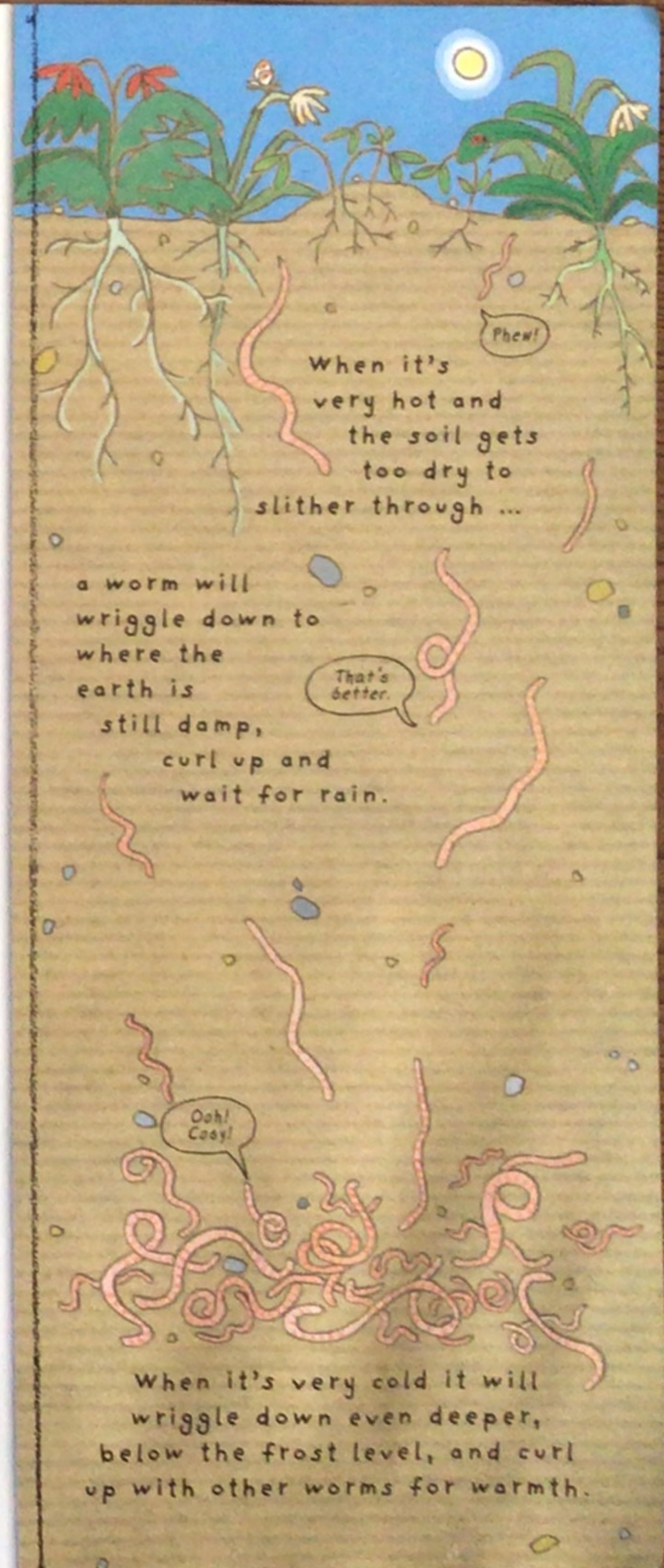
I took a biscuit. "What if it doesn't rain?"
Gran winked at me. "We'll use
the watering can, and pretend."
I finished my biscuit as fast as I could.
"Can we trick the worms NOW?"



Gran went to fill the watering can and I watered the earth. Then I stood back — I didn't want worms chewing at my shoes.



"They only put their heads out," Gran promised. "And it'll be a while before they do."



When it's very hot and the soil gets too dry to slither through ...

a worm will wriggle down to where the earth is still damp, curl up and wait for rain.

When it's very cold it will wriggle down even deeper, below the frost level, and curl up with other worms for warmth.

Gran was right. I had time to eat
two more biscuits before she said,
"Look!"

"WOW," I said.
I could just see the tip of
a worm above the earth.
"Now watch this..."
Gran stamped, and the
worm disappeared.

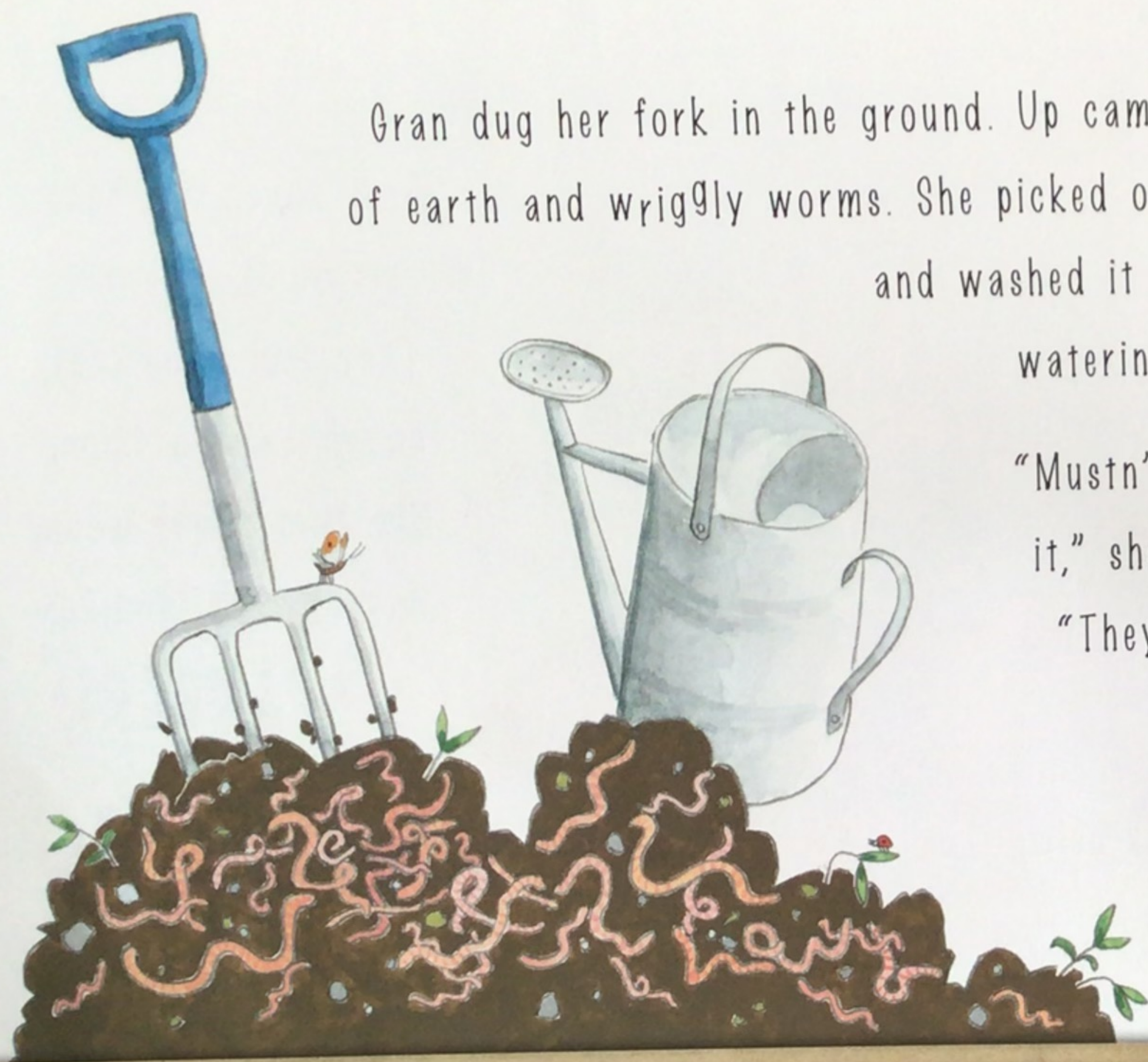


"Did it see you?" I asked.
Gran shook her head.
"Worms don't have eyes.
They feel vibrations,
though — and a thump
like that might mean
Hungry Bird landing.
DANGER!"



Gran dug her fork in the ground. Up came lots of earth and wriggly worms. She picked one up, and washed it in the watering can.

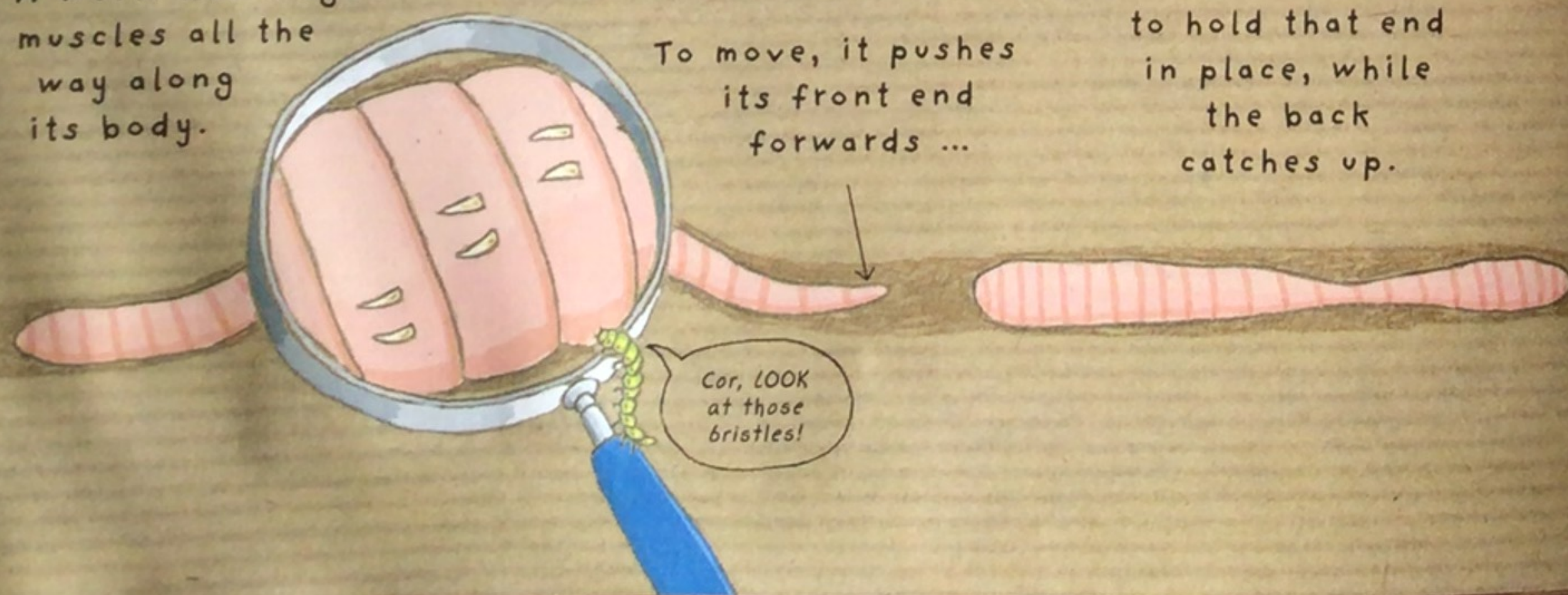
"Mustn't drop it," she said.
"They can't swim."



Gran put the clean worm on some paper and held it near my ear. I could hear a tiny rustling noise.
"What's that?"
"They're covered in little bristles," Gran said.
"The bristles and their muscles help them move."



A worm has ridged muscles all the way along its body.



To move, it pushes its front end forwards ...

and uses its bristles to hold that end in place, while the back catches up.

The back end bristles stop the worm from sliding backwards,

while the front end tunnels forwards again into the earth

Cheerio!

... just like a slinky toy.

"I've got muscles too!"

I bent my arm so Gran could see.

"If you've got so many muscles," she said,
"maybe you'd like to help me plant my
sunflower seedlings?"

"OK," I nodded, and then I thought
of something.



"When I go to school on
Monday I'm going to say that I've got lots of new friends!"

"Good idea," Gran said.

"Actually," I said, "I might not actually
say they're worms..."



HOW TO BE A WormOLOGIST!

LOOK OUT FOR...

- * Worm casts in your garden, or in the park.
- * Leaves sticking up out of the earth.
- * Worms on the surface after rain.



EXPERIMENT BY...

- * Watering a dry patch of grass or earth and watching to see if worms come up.
- * Tapping on the ground to see if you can make a worm believe it's raining.
- * Carefully digging up a forkful of earth and counting how many worms you find.



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A WORM IN THE HAND...

When you pick up a worm, remember to be respectful; a worm is a living creature.

- * Check how it feels. *Is it smooth? Is it slimy? Can you feel the bristles?*
 - * Watch how it moves.
- * *Is it a youngster or an adult? (Adults have a clitellum – a yellow ring around their body.)*
 - * Put the worm back on newly-dug earth, and watch how it wriggles away.

Always wash your hands after touching worms.



Index

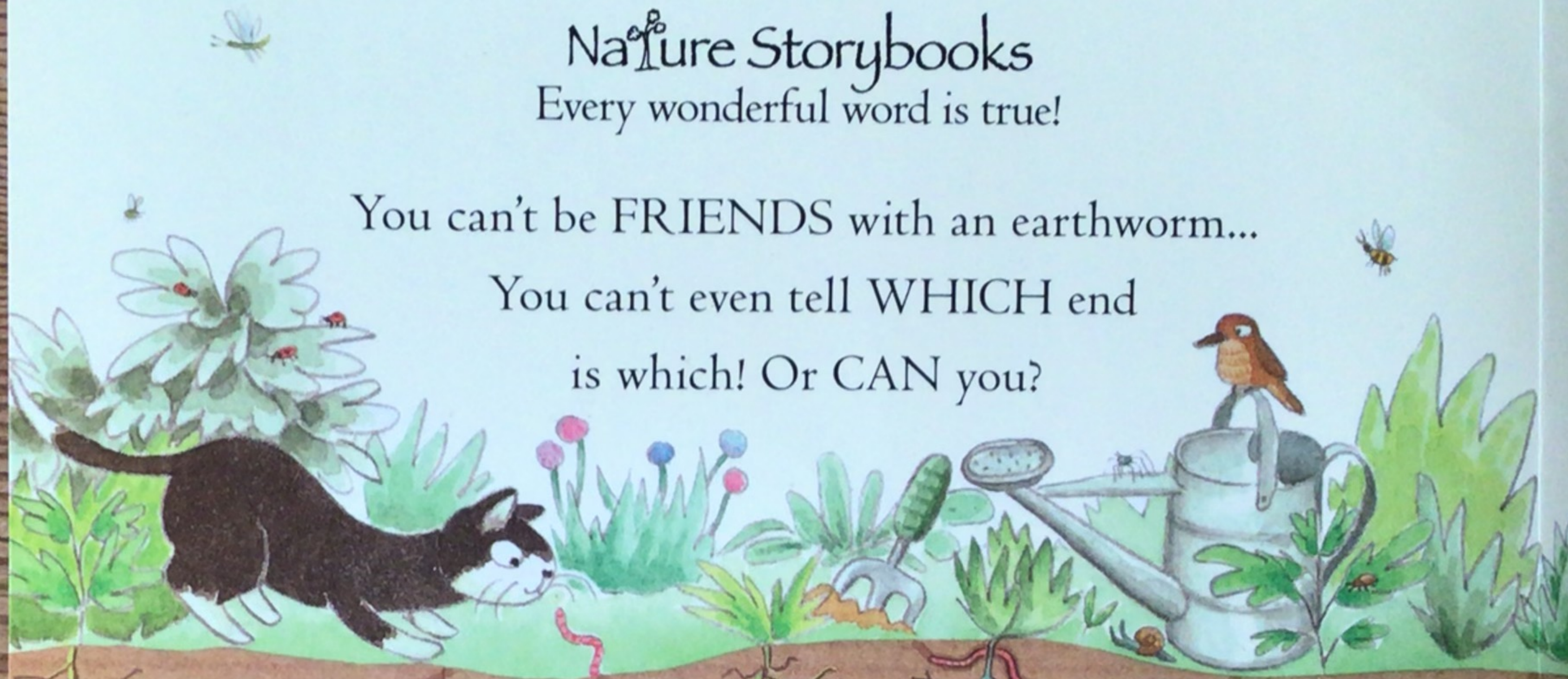
Look up the pages to find out about all these wormy things.

Don't forget to look at both kinds of word –
this kind
and
this kind.

- *
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You can't be FRIENDS with an earthworm...
You can't even tell WHICH end
is which! Or CAN you?



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