Minibeast Hunt: Sorting Bugs by Legs, Shell or Wings

Key points

- Reception children develop observation and sorting skills by looking closely at real bugs and grouping them by what they see – legs, shells, wings.
- This activity links to Understanding the World in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), helping children learn about nature through play and exploration.
- Sorting and grouping is an early maths skill that builds thinking children need for classifying and organising information later on.
- You don't need special equipment – a garden, park or quiet corner outdoors is enough to find woodlice, snails, spiders and butterflies.
- Keep it relaxed and let your child's curiosity lead; there's no 'right answer' – different ways of sorting are all valuable learning.

Things to try at home

- Go on a slow walk around the garden or park and pause when your child spots a bug; ask them to describe what they see – how many legs, does it have a shell, does it have wings?
- Make a simple sorting mat: draw circles or sections on paper, and let your child sort toy bugs, pictures or small stones into groups however they choose.
- Keep a notebook or sketchbook and let your child draw the bugs they find, even if the drawings are wobbly – this helps them look closely and remember.
- Play a guessing game: describe a bug you've seen together ('it has eight legs and no wings') and see if your child can guess or mime what it might be.
- If you find a minibeast, gently pop it in a clear container for a few moments so your child can watch it move, then let it go – this teaches care and respect too.

Find out more

- The EYFS Framework on the Department for Education website explains how outdoor play and observing nature support early learning.
- Ask your child's teacher or early years practitioner for ideas on how sorting and classification are explored in your setting.
- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Wildlife Trusts have child-friendly guides to spotting common garden creatures.