



KILL THE WORMS! LET THEM LIVE!

A lesson in critical thinking

A teacher and a mom get together to promote schoolyard democracy.

To make the best decision about a subject, it is wise to learn as much as you can about it.

For two years, an apple tree in a New Brunswick schoolyard had been laden with huge nests of army worms. The first year, the children admired the insects, examining their markings and marvelling at the way they spun their yellow cocoons.



The children let the worms crawl over their bodies, tickling their skin. But the second year the worms had devoured every leaf on the tree.

"Kill the worms!" said some children. "They are eating all the leaves on our apple tree and it will die!" "Let them live!" said some others. "The worms aren't hurting us." "Kill the worms! Let them live!" The words resounded throughout the schoolyard.



The teacher, seeing an opportunity to teach an important lesson, suggested everyone meet under the willow tree to discuss what to do. So, at their willow tree gathering place the children debated what to do, back and forth. They came to a decision: Save the worms (for wouldn't drowning them hurt their feelings?).

*"Dear Kathy," the children wrote.
"We have an army worm problem."*



But one boy against saving the worms sobbed in the corner. He was sad for the tree: It was going to die. The teacher suggested the children write a letter to a class mom, Kathy, who was a forester, for some expert advice.

Kathy replied with a detailed letter. She explained that the apple tree has defenses against the worms (two sets of leaves) and only if it is weak or sick will it die. This is Nature's way, she said, of keeping a balance between the apple trees and the worms who, after all, need the trees to reproduce.

One child observed, "There aren't as many worms this year, so the tree won't die." Save the worms! This time, everyone agreed.



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