

Exploring off-trail can be a rewarding experience for any nature observer. Carefully roll a log or flip a rock, capture a critter, and create a scientific diagram.

Rotten Log Investigation

Materials:

Nature Journal
Sharp pencil (*not a pen*)
Magnifying lens (*or camera/phone*) for close examination
Container to temporarily house critters
Rotten log or rock to explore

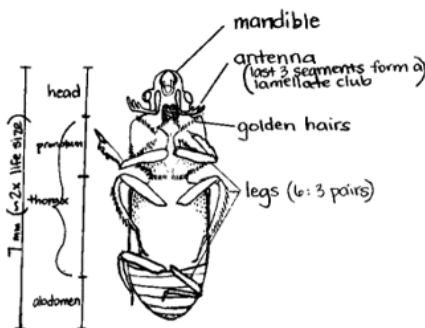
Instructions:

1. Find an empty container for your rotten log critters. Plastic containers with snapping lids or clean peanut butter jars work well. Place a damp paper towel at the bottom of your container to keep critters happy while you look at them.
2. Review the safety precautions.
3. Go outside and find a rotten log or rock to investigate.
4. Roll it toward you. Safely and gently collect 1– 2 critters to closely examine. Roll the log/rock back where it was.
5. Using your journal and the scientific diagram guidelines, create a diagram of your critter.
6. Safely release your rotten log critter(s) next to the log or rock where you found them.

CORRECT

VENTRAL VIEW, BESS BEETLE

Odontotaenius disjunctus



Having fun?

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Scientific Diagram Guidelines

Scientists use diagrams to record information clearly and concisely. No special skills are needed, just careful observation and attention to detail. The goal is not to create art, but to record what you actually see. Your diagram should:

- Be large enough to show details.
- Include a descriptive title at the top (*specify the type of view— top, side, dorsal, ventral, etc.*).
- Use stippling or cross-hatches instead of shading to create darker areas.
- Include labels- printed horizontally and aligned vertically. Don't underline labels.
- Include label lines drawn with a ruler that end at the center of the structure being labeled. Don't use arrows or cross label lines.
- Include underlined scientific names- capitalize the genus name, lowercase the species name.
- Include notes of important information that cannot be seen.
- Include scale bars to indicate actual size.

Safety Precautions

- Look out for poison ivy.
- Look out for stinging/biting insects such as ground-nesting yellow-jackets or fire ant mounds.
- Look up for potential falling limbs or trees.
- Wear long pants and socks or use insect repellent to avoid ticks and biting insects. Check for ticks when you return indoors.
- Look out for venomous snakes and spiders. These creatures are not malicious, but they may cause harm if startled.
- Always roll or lift an object toward you so that the object is between you and any animals underneath.
- Minimize your impact: return logs, rocks, and leaf litter to their original position; handle live animals gently and release them next to the log or rock where you found them.