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## A Handful Of Dirt



## **Synopsis**

Soil may not be alive, but amazingly, multitudes of microscopic creatures live there, battling it out in an eat-or-be-eaten world. These tiny creatures, invisible to our eyes, provide food for the insects that in turn feed the reptiles and mammals that live in and above the soil. You'll never look at the ground you walk on in the same way after Raymond Bial, an award-winning photo essayist, takes you on this eye-opening, down-and-dirty tour of one of the earth's most precious resources.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: 1190L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

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Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #790,611 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #123 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Science Studies > Nature > Rocks & Minerals #566 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Science Studies > Environment & Ecology #954 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Health > Diseases

Age Range: 7 - 10 years

Grade Level: 2 - 3

## **Customer Reviews**

Grade 3-5-Readers who take a good look at dirt through Bial's eyes (and his camera lens) will never again look down on this rich, lifeful, life-giving "element." The readable, informative text introduces dirt dwellers from the tiniest protozoans through myriad invertebrates to the mammals and reptiles whose burrows aerate the earth, all depicted in large, sharp, full-color photos. The author includes basic instructions for setting up a home compost heap, and urges his audience to feel the same reverence for the soil and growing things as he learned from a beloved grandfather (whose well-worn tools are displayed lovingly in a full-page photo). Team this treasure with such practical works as Eleonore Schmid's attractive *The Living Earth* (North-South, 1994), Laurence Pringle's engaging *Twist, Wiggle, and Squirm: A Book about Earthworms* (Crowell, 1973; o.p.), and Bianca

Lavies's stunning Compost Critters (Dutton, 1993) for a scientific investigation, or, for a more poetic configuration, try Ken Robbins's lyrical Earth (Holt, 1995) and Peggy Christian's poignant If You Find a Rock (Harcourt, 2000). Patricia Manning, formerly at Eastchester Public Library, NY Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Raymond Bial recently retired from his position as a college library director at the University of Illinois. He continues to create the beautiful photo-essays that have garnered him awards and high praise. His Amish Home was an ALA Notable Book, and, in a starred review, Booklist called his Tenement: Immigrant Life on the Lower East Side "an excellent example of how books can bring the past into the present." Raymond lives in Urbana, Illinois, with his wife and two younger children, Sarah and Luke. His oldest daughter, Anna, is a fashion designer in New York City.

As an ex-scientist I was very impressed with this book. It has excellent content with respect to the importance of soil, what is in it and why it is important to the environment, life and planet. This information is presented in an age appropriate manner and the photographs are fantastic. Although this product is expensive for a 32 page book. It is hardcover, printed on high quality paper and has large and useful photographs that will spark the imagination of a youngster. This is exactly the kind of book I would have loved as a young man and I find that the kids I share it with seem to find it extremely interesting. I'm so happy that there are people putting out fine books like these for our kids. Among stimulating an appreciation and inquisitive attitude toward nature, it promotes an appreciation for protecting the environment and lays the groundwork for understanding ecology from the ground up... no pun intended!

This book was awesome! We did an extensive unit on dirt/soil last spring. My students were so into it and this book was marvelous! An excellent resource for the science classroom.

A cute little book, maybe a 15 minute read, with nice pictures of generic garden critters and stuff like on the cover. Good for a coffee table offering to those who have no idea about a garden. Obviously no meaningful substance.

After reading the 5-star reviews of this book, I requested it from the library, and was disappointed. While it has some lovely photos and a pleasant tone, it suffers from lack of editing by a scientist. As a naturalist and a parent, I think it's critical to get the information right, and the author misses the mark

in too many cases. For example, the author states: "ground squirrels, gophers, and prairie dogs... prefer dry places." Hold on a minute--chipmunks and groundhogs are ground squirrels, too; you don't see many of those in dry places. Here's another: "ocean waves over time grind large stones into grains of sand on the beach." While that is true for some localities, the statement is misleading. The vast majority of beaches form when rivers deposit sediments in the oceans, and ocean currents transport the sediments to beaches. Those sediments formed miles away, not in situ. And perhaps worst, the section on mushrooms: "Those with bright colors or white gills are pure poison" -not always true! And "It's best to stay away from mushrooms, except those at the grocery store." Yes, but there's no "it's best" about it--never eat mushrooms collected outside unless you are an expert in mushroom identification--the author should make this absolutely clear. There are other factual errors as well. To some people, these may seem like minor quibbles, but I believe that if you're going to write a book, readers will believe you're an expert in the subject, and your information needs to be correct. This book serves as a vehicle for some nice photos; the text needs some work.

Beautifully illustrated with informative text. The photographs are spectacular! The text is engaging for students.

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