

Do worms love?



Upper 4 have been studying a unit of poetry called 'Animals, Monsters, and Humanity'. During a lesson on Margaret Atwood's unsettling poem, 'Song of the Worms', some students noticed the strange personification in the couplet, 'we come into the open air/at night only to love'. We therefore decided to stage a debate on the following question: 'Can a worm feel love?'

The debate was framed by a discussion between William and Wendy. For William, love is a combination of 'instinct', stimuli, and nervous response; the fact that human beings can think about these instincts and worms can't doesn't mean that worms don't feel it. But for Wendy, emotions are 'complex' combinations of feelings that necessarily involve a social context and a consciousness that can think about them; worms can't love because they can't think about it - or debate what it is!

Eleanor muddied the waters further by suggesting that love involves discrimination. If worms can tell each other apart and choose each other, then is it not at least possible for them to behave as if they were in love?

Dr Oliver Neto