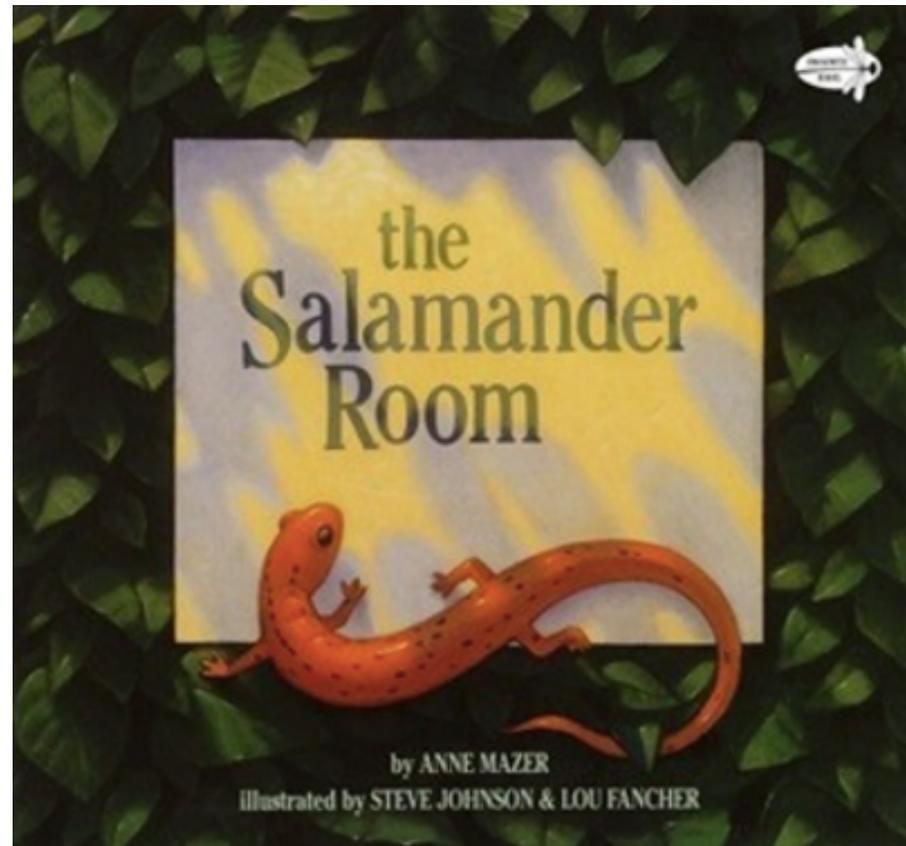


**Literature in Context:  
A Community-Based Education Guide  
to *The Salamander Room***



by Robin Huntley  
© Dirigo Learning 2018



## Summary

*The Salamander Room* is told through the imagination of a young boy who desperately longs to bring an amphibian friend home with him. Beginning in the woods, the story starts when a small, orange salamander is discovered underneath leaf litter. The boy, whose imagination drives the story's development, believes the salamander finds his hand cozy and perhaps even preferable to its natural habitat – and from this assumption ensues an explanation of the many creative measures that could be taken in order to make the salamander feel at home in his bedroom. The boy first imagines that the salamander can live happily right in the drawer of his bedside table, but prompting from an adult allows him to think through all of the salamander's many needs, and the unintended consequences that meeting these needs might have. For example, insects will need to be introduced into his bedroom so that the salamander has a food source – but what will happen when the insects breed and overpopulate? Well, of course, the roof of his bedroom will be taken off so that birds can fly in to keep the insect population in check! *The Salamander Room* bridges the gap between fiction and nonfiction, using imaginative storytelling to teach readers about habitat and the interconnectedness of nature.

## Critical Thinking Questions

As *The Salamander Room* is a fictional text rooted in nonfiction topics, it can be used to strengthen reading and comprehension skills and can double as a catalyst for scientific studies as well. The critical thinking questions outlined here are separated into categories based on their intended use, but can be used in a blended manner as well.

### Questions for Understanding the Text

- Why did the boy feel that it was important to bring the salamander home?
- How does the boy plan to care for the salamander?
- Does the boy think he and the salamander have similar needs? Explain.
- The boy seems to think he can replicate the salamander's habitat. Would the salamander miss the forest if he lived inside?
- Would you like living in a bedroom forest if you were the salamander? Why or why not?
- What do you think it would be like to live in an indoor woods? How would it be different from a real woods? How might it be the same?
- How does the boy feel about the salamander? How can you tell?

### *Questions for Understanding Habitat*

- What kind of habitat does a red salamander naturally live in? How can you tell?
- What are a salamander's needs for food, water, and shelter?
- Could a salamander actually live in side? Explain.
- Everything in nature is connected. Can you find an example of connections between creatures within the story?
- All of the creatures mentioned in the story rely on different parts of the forest in order to survive. What creatures are there besides salamanders? What parts of the forest allow them to survive?

## **Community-Based Learning Map**

*The Salamander Room* helps readers connect to the landscape around them. It is an especially useful text in the springtime, when salamanders and frogs are emerging from their winter hibernation to breed and lay eggs. The resources below can be used to put *The Salamander Room* into a community-based context, and simultaneously support studies of vernal pool habitat and phenology.

### *Resources for Self-Directed Learning about Salamanders and Their Habitats*

#### **Learning Landscape for April: Spring's Big Night & Vernal Pool Habitat**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2018/03/26/hf-756/>

Created for use during springtime, this guide explains the basics of vernal pool habitat and the species that can be found there. Additionally, this information is linked to further resources that can be used to locate, explore, and learn about local vernal pools. Resources included in this Learning Landscape guide include maps of vernal pools statewide, citizen science opportunities, and more.

#### **Video Review: 525,600 Minutes of Life in a Vernal Pool**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2008/04/07/video005/>

Set to a well-known song from a famous musical, this video chronicles a year in the life of a vernal pool in Florence, Massachusetts. Still photos and video clips spotlight the hallmark species of a vernal pool, and allow viewers to see how the pool changes slowly over time. While the song may become an earworm, this video is an excellent resource for quickly learning the basics of vernal pools and the numerous species that they support.

## **Literrariums: The Art and Science of Story Terrariums**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2013/12/09/literrariums-the-art-science-of-story-terrariums/>

*The Salamander Room* is a perfect book for this project, which calls for readers to replicate scenes from a story in terrarium format. A literarium for *The Salamander Room* could feature the salamander, the boy, and some bedroom features so as to give the illusion that the terrarium is both salamander habitat and the inside of a young boy's room. This project may be the only surefire way to ensure that a bit of salamander habitat comes inside! (Please, spare the living salamanders from an indoor life and create your own model salamander!)

## **Salamander Species in Massachusetts**

<https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/reptiles-amphibians/salamanders/salamander-species-in-massachusetts>

This web-based guide spotlights the 12 species of salamander that can be found in Massachusetts. Images and short descriptions teach readers the basics of identifying each species – go search for some salamanders and see what you're able to find! Some species are specific to certain regions or habitats and may not be found locally.

## **About Salamanders**

<https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/reptiles-amphibians/salamanders/about>

Mass Audubon provides a basic overview of salamander behavior and their life cycles that sheds light on the subtleties that make salamanders unique within the world of amphibians.

## **Salamander Situations and Solutions**

<https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/reptiles-amphibians/salamanders/situations-solutions>

Three of the eleven native salamander species in Massachusetts are endangered due to loss of habitat and the presence of road traffic in their spring migration routes. Learn what you can do to help support local salamander populations so that your amphibious neighbors may flourish!