THE THOUSAND FOOT WORM

Listen to the sound of an earthworm walking.

THE SETUP
When you think about worms, you think wiggle, not walk. But they have hundreds of little foot-like bristles called setae that propel them through the dirt. You can hear an ordinary earthworm marching along if you place it on a piece of construction paper. You will have to listen closely, of course, because these “feet” are very little. If you have trouble hearing the worm walking, roll a piece of paper into a cone and use it as a hearing aid. Put the small end near your ear and the wide end directly above the worm.

ANOTHER TIP
If your worm is not very active, place the paper in a well-lit spot and the worm will start searching for shade.
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INSIDER INFORMATION
Not only can you hear the setae moving, you can feel them. Worms may be round but they have a definite underside. Run your finger gently back and forth on a worm. The side that has the most resistance is the underside. Each segment has four pairs of setae. With a hand lens, you can see them. A full grown earthworm has between 100 and 150 segments. That means almost a thousand marching “feet.”

The worm uses the setae for traction as it pushes through the soil. When it is attacked, it digs them into the tunnel walls and hangs on for dear life. You must be careful not to yank on a worm to get it out of the ground. It will break in half before it will let go.

An earthworm has no eyes, eats dirt, and breathes through its skin. That doesn’t sound like an important critter. But think again. Without earthworms, the soil would be so compact that plants would die. It takes a whole lot of worms to be gardeners to the world.

An acre of soil may contain more than a million of them. If all the worms were gathered up, they would weigh ten times the total weight of the entire human population. Or, put another way, that’s sixty percent of the weight of all living animals on earth!

When you are finished listening to worms, remember to return them to the place you found them. Don’t just dump them on the lawn. They may have trouble finding their way back to burrows.