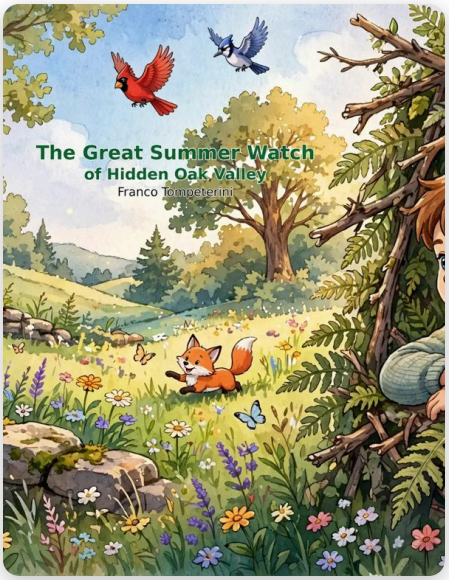


HIDDEN OAK VALLEY · BOOK 4 · SUMMER

The Great Summer Watch of Hidden Oak Valley

Teacher & Homeschool Guide

Summer arrives, and Hickory opens his notebook to four questions he circled at the end of spring. With Mr. Acorn, he builds a wildlife blind and watches Hidden Oak Valley the way real scientists do: the dawn chorus, cold-blooded sunbathers, a buzzing meadow, firefly night, trees talking through their roots, a fallen giant recycled into soil, and the creek chorus. On the last Saturday of summer they hold a Great Summer Count — and write one new question: What will we discover next summer?

Best for: ages 9–12 (younger children can follow along as a read-aloud).
Plan: one week, about 30–45 minutes a day.
Free to print and copy for your classroom, library, or homeschool.

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Who's who in the valley

- **Hickory**: now a field watcher with a notebook, a homemade blind, and four questions to answer.
- **Mr. Acorn**: Hickory's best friend and fellow watcher. He learns fox walking, maps firefly blinks, and earns a pinecone badge.
- **Mrs. Mouse**: teaches the first rule of field science ("eyes, not guesses"), explains thermoregulation, bioluminescence, mushrooms, tadpoles, and runs the end-of-summer count.
- **Mrs. Robin**: explains the dawn chorus and introduces the mockingbird.
- **Mr. Owl**: told Hickory how to build a blind, and later explains how trees talk through a mycorrhizal network — the "wood wide web."
- **Mr. Rabbit**: uses soft, rotted wood from the fallen oak in his carrot bed (hugelkultur) and adds a hawk sighting to the final count.

Discussion questions, chapter by chapter

Chapter 1: The Notebook of Questions

1. What four questions has Hickory circled in his notebook?
2. What is a blind, and why do wildlife scientists use one?
3. What is Mrs. Mouse's first rule of field science? Why does she say the notebook is for "eyes, not guesses"?
4. What does Hickory find on the milkweed, and why doesn't he touch it?
5. Name the five watch spots on the Watch Plan, and the time of day for each.

Chapter 2: Building the Blind

1. Mr. Owl's secret is to "build with what the forest gives you." How do the boys put that into practice?
2. What rule do they recite before the first watch? ("We watch. We write…")
3. What happens when Mr. Acorn sneezes in the blind? What is fox walking, and how does it help?

Chapter 3: The Dawn Chorus

1. What three reasons does Mrs. Robin give for birds singing all together at sunrise?
2. Which bird songs do they learn, and what is special about the mockingbird?
3. Why does Hickory say the mockingbird is like a watcher?

Chapter 4: Cold-Blooded Sunbathers

1. What's the difference between warm-blooded and cold-blooded animals?
2. What does "bask" mean? Which three animals do they find on the stone wall?
3. How does a snake shed its skin? Why should you leave a snake alone if its eyes look cloudy?

Chapter 5: The Buzzing Meadow

1. How do bees and flowers both win from pollination?
2. Why did Hickory plant milkweed, and what does he see in the wild meadow?
3. How does the praying mantis hunt, and how is that like the watchers in the blind?
4. Mr. Acorn says the meadow is like a town. What "jobs" does he give the insects?

Chapter 6: Firefly Night

1. What is bioluminescence? How is a firefly's light different from a lightbulb?
2. Why do fireflies blink, and why do different kinds use different flash patterns?
3. What is the watcher's rule for catching fireflies?

Chapter 7: The Talking Trees

1. If trees have no mouths, how can they "talk" to each other?
2. What is the mycorrhizal network, or "wood wide web"? How do mother trees help seedlings, and how do trees warn one another about hungry insects?
3. Mrs. Mouse says a mushroom is only the fruit, like an apple on a tree. Where is the rest of the fungus? Why shouldn't you eat a wild mushroom?

Chapter 8: The Fallen Giant

1. The fallen oak isn't empty. Who is living in and on it?
2. Mrs. Mouse says a fallen tree doesn't disappear — it changes. How does it become "the forest's future"?
3. What is hugelkultur, and how does Mr. Rabbit use the rotted wood?
4. Who is in the "clean-up crew"?

Chapter 9: The Creek Chorus

1. How is the creek chorus like the dawn chorus?
2. What does metamorphosis mean? Give the frog steps and the butterfly steps from the book.
3. What is the empty shell on the reed, and what does it tell you about a dragonfly's life?
4. Hickory writes, "Everything's a neighborhood if you sit still long enough." What does he mean?

Chapter 10: The Great Summer Count

1. What is a bioblitz?
2. How many kinds of animals do they count from the blind, and what is the total after friends add their sightings?
3. What new question does Hickory circle three times?
4. The pinecone medals honor "patience, quiet feet, and eyes that really see." Which of those do you want to practice?
5. Under "EYES, NOT GUESSES," Hickory writes: "Summer was for answering. Fall will be for wondering." What might he wonder about next?

Big-picture questions

1. Mrs. Mouse says, "Write what you see — not what you think you see." Why does that matter for scientists, and in everyday life?
2. Hickory realizes the valley is always talking — in songs, in lights, and through roots. Where do you notice nature "talking" near you?
3. "Nothing in nature is wasted." How does the fallen tree show that? How could people live a little more that way too?
4. The watching never really ends. What would you watch, quietly, for fifteen minutes?

Vocabulary

Word	What it means in the story
Blind	A little shelter of branches and leaves that blends into the forest, so you can sit still and watch animals without being seen.
Eyes, not guesses	Mrs. Mouse's first rule of field science: write what you see, not what you think an animal feels or means.
Dawn chorus	Birds singing together at sunrise. Songs carry farther in cool morning air.
Territory	The trees and space a bird claims. One reason to sing is to say, "this is mine."
Mockingbird	A bird that learns and mixes the songs of other birds — and other sounds — into one long song.
Warm-blooded	Animals whose bodies make their own heat, like a furnace that never turns off.
Cold-blooded	Animals whose bodies cannot make heat, so they borrow it from the sun.
Bask	To spread out in the sun and soak up warmth, the way the turtle, lizard, and garter snake do on the stone wall.
Shed	How a snake outgrows its skin and crawls out of it. Cloudy eyes mean a shed is near — do not disturb.
Pollen baskets	Pollen packed on a bee's legs, carried home to feed baby bees.
Pollination	When pollen rubs off on the next flower while a bee is gathering nectar. "Everybody wins."
Bioluminescence	Living light. Inside a firefly's tail, a chemical mixes with air and makes light without making heat.
Mycorrhizal network	Tiny fungal threads that connect tree roots underground. Mr. Owl also calls it the "wood wide web."
Spores	A fungus's "seeds." Mushrooms push up after rain to scatter them on the wind.
Hugelkultur	A gardening method Mr. Rabbit describes: bury a log and let it hold water and feed the soil as it breaks down.
Metamorphosis	"Change of shape." Frogs: egg, tadpole, froglet, frog. Butterflies: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, butterfly.
Nymph	A dragonfly baby that lives underwater for years, then climbs a reed, leaves its shell, and flies away.
Bioblitz	Counting every living thing in one place, all at once, to take a snapshot of the wild.

Tip: have students keep a word list in a notebook, just like Hickory keeps his.

A simple one-week plan

Day	Read	Do
Day 1	Chapters 1–2	Write four questions of your own and circle them. Build a Backyard Blind (Activity 1) or practice being "furniture" for 15 minutes. Make Watcher's Binoculars (Activity 2). Recite the watcher's rule: we watch, we write, we never chase.
Day 2	Chapters 3–4	Go outside at a quiet hour and list birds you hear. Make a two-column chart: warm-blooded vs. cold-blooded. If you find a shed snakeskin, look closely and leave live snakes alone — cloudy eyes means do not disturb.
Day 3	Chapters 5–6	Watch one flower for pollinators and list the "jobs" in your yard (bees, butterflies, dragonflies, and so on). If it is firefly season, do the Firefly Lantern Jar (Activity 4) and follow the 10-minute rule. If not, draw the blink patterns from the book: a slow pulse, a triple flash, and a steady glow in the grass.
Day 4	Chapters 7–8	After rain, look for mushrooms — look, learn, and leave them be; never eat a wild mushroom. Visit a fallen log and list the clean-up crew you find (fungi, beetles, moss, seedlings).
Day 5	Chapters 9–10	Run a Backyard Bioblitz (Activity 3): 15 minutes, seen and heard. Write one new question and circle it three times. Optional: tie a pinecone "Official Valley Watcher" badge for patience, quiet feet, and eyes that really see.

Nature-learning tie-ins

- **Keep a field notebook:** write what you see, not what you guess. Date each entry, the way Hickory labels Day 1, Day 2, and so on.
- **Watch at the edges of the day:** dawn for birds, dusk for frogs and fireflies. Midday is good for sunbathing reptiles and a busy meadow.
- **Pollinator watch:** sit by wildflowers or a milkweed plant and tally bees, butterflies, and other visitors. Do not touch a monarch caterpillar — "watchers don't disturb."
- **Dark-sky fireflies:** turn off porch lights for a better show. Catch only a few, watch for 10 minutes, then let them go. Never keep fireflies overnight.
- **Forest floor:** after rain, look at mushrooms as the "fruit" of a hidden web. Visit a fallen log and name who is recycling it.
- **Water's edge:** listen for frog songs, look for tadpoles, and if you find a dry dragonfly nymph shell, look and leave it.
- **Count with the seasons:** do a 15-minute bioblitz in the same spot in different seasons and compare the totals, as the book suggests.

Activities in the back of the book

- Activity 1: Build a Backyard Blind (camouflage, 15 quiet minutes, notebook). Build it in a backyard or garden, never near a street.
- Activity 2: Make Watcher's Binoculars (two cardboard tubes, tape, and a neck strap). They will not magnify, but they help you focus. Never look at the sun through any binoculars.
- Activity 3: Run a Backyard Bioblitz (15 minutes, "Seen" and "Heard"). Sketch an unknown insect, then let it go where you found it.
- Activity 4: Firefly Lantern Jar (damp leaf, air holes, 10 minutes, then freedom). Firefly light is cool — it makes almost no heat.

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