The Queen of the Colony

Most colonies have one queen. The queen ant is the biggest ant in the colony. Worker ants build a nest for her. The workers feed, guard, and even bathe her.

The queen’s job is to lay tiny eggs. Each egg is as small as a grain of sand. Most of the eggs will hatch into female ants. Females are the workers, so many female ants are needed for the colony to survive.

Questions to talk about:
1. How many queens does a colony have?
2. Who are the workers?
3. What is the job of the queen ant?

I’ve listened to my child read the passage, and we’ve discussed the questions.

Date __________ Signed _________________________________

Optional Second Reading (initial here): __________
Ant Communities

Chapter 1 • Ant Facts

Ant Anatomy
Did you know that ants are insects? Like all insects, they have six legs and three body parts. All ants have a head, a thorax, and an abdomen. Ants also have antennas on their heads. Antennas help them hear, taste, and smell.

Survivors
Ants have been on Earth since the dinosaurs. They can survive in almost any habitat.

Like all living things, ants need each other to survive. Like people, these insects live and work together in communities. These communities are called colonies.

Chapter 2 • Colonies

The Nest
If you see a trail of ants, they may be on their way to their front door. The ant colony lives in a nest. The nest is like an underground apartment with many rooms. These rooms are called chambers.

The nest has special chambers for different things—storerooms for food, nurseries for baby ants, rooms for resting, and rooms for trash. The queen ant has her own chamber.

Questions to talk about:
1. What kind of animal is an ant?
2. What are ant communities called?
3. What are the nests like?
Stage 3: Pupas
During the third stage, the larvae spin cocoons around their bodies. Now the baby ants are called pupas. The pupas grow inside their cocoons.

Stage 4: Adults
When the pupas have changed into adult ants, worker ants bite open the cocoons. During this fourth stage, the new adult ants crawl out. Soon they will be strong and ready to do their jobs within the colony.

Questions to talk about:
1. What do the larvae spin around their bodies?
2. How do the pupas get out of their cocoons?

I’ve listened to my child read the passage, and we’ve discussed the questions.

Date __________ Signed ___________________________________________

Optional Second Reading (initial here): ________
Stage 1: Eggs

As soon as the queen lays her eggs, worker ants carry the eggs to the nursery. The eggs must be kept at the right temperature, so the nursery workers move the eggs to different chambers several times a day.

Stage 2: Larvas

When the eggs hatch, the baby ants look like tiny worms called larvas. The worker ants clean the larvas and keep them warm by moving them to different chambers. The workers even feed the babies food from their own stomachs.

Questions to talk about:
1. How many stages are in an ant’s life?
2. What do larvas look like?
3. How do the worker ants take care of the larvas?
Cleanup
Some workers clean the nest, taking unused food and even dead ants to the nest’s dump. The dump may be inside or outside the nest.

Guard Duty
Some worker ants protect the nest. They stand near the entrance to watch out for other animals and ants that don’t belong.

If danger is near, these ants let out a strong smell to warn the other ants. Ants on guard duty may even attack enemies.

Nursery
Nursery workers take care of the eggs, larvae, and pupas by keeping them warm and well fed.

Questions to talk about:
1. How do guard ants warn the other ants when danger is near?
2. If you were an ant, which job would you want?

I’ve listened to my child read the passage, and we’ve discussed the questions.

Date __________ Signed ____________________________

Optional Second Reading (initial here): ________
Ant Communities
Chapter 4 • Working Together

A Community of Workers
It takes a community of workers to care for an ant colony. Ants do many jobs:

Construction
Ants that do construction work use their jaws to dig out chambers and tunnels in the nest. Have you ever seen an anthill? Construction workers carry the extra dirt out of the chambers, making a hill of dirt above the nest.

Food Service
Finding food is dangerous because the ants must leave the safety of their nest. Ants look for food wherever it can be found.

Ants wave their antennas in the air looking for food. When an ant finds food, it returns to the nest, dragging its body on the ground. This makes a smelly path that other ants can follow.

Questions to talk about:
1. What are five different ant jobs?
2. How do construction ants dig out chambers and tunnels?
3. Why is finding food dangerous?
Then Antonia had an idea to put the purple buttons on the matchbox, like wheels on a cart. It would be useful for moving the baby ants around, she thought. But the matchbox cart got stuck in the tight turns of the nest’s tunnels. And the baby ants got carsick.

“No more ideas!” her sisters said. “Back to work! No time to dawdle!”

Questions to talk about:
1. What happened to the baby cart?
2. Why did Antonia’s sisters tell her to get back to work?

I’ve listened to my child read the passage, and we’ve discussed the questions.

Date __________ Signed ________________________________

Optional Second Reading (initial here): ________
An Ant With Ideas

Chapter 1 • Cleanup Worker

Antonia liked living next to the big red house. The grass was thick and green. The dirt was rich, black, and easy to dig. There were lots of mouth-watering insects to eat.

But Antonia liked the trash cans best. Her nest was right beside them. Such wonderful things fell out of the cans! She found not only sweet food, but things that made her imagination fly—purple buttons, a matchbox, a drinking straw, marbles that swirled with color. Antonia kept her treasures in a deep crack in the sidewalk.

Antonia was a cleanup worker. All day, she marched in a line with her sisters, taking leftover food out of the nest. As they worked, she kept an eye out for more treasures. When she slowed down to look, her sisters would say, “Back to work, Antonia! No time to dawdle!”

Chapter 2 • Antonia’s Ideas

Antonia liked her job as a cleanup worker, but she really wanted to be a construction worker. After all, an ant with ideas should be in construction!

One time, Antonia had an idea to put a pretty marble on top of their nest. She thought that if any other ants attacked their nest, she and her sisters could roll the marble down the nest hill to stop them. But the marble rolled off by accident one day, and 27 of her sisters ended up in the hospital.

Questions to talk about:
1. What was Antonia’s job?
2. What made Antonia’s sisters unhappy with her?
3. What did Antonia really want to do?
So Antonia and the strongest workers got the straw from the crack in the sidewalk. They pushed and pulled it down to the collapsing tunnel. It worked! The tunnel roof stayed up.

The crew leader was impressed. “An ant with ideas should be in construction!” the crew leader said. “Let’s get to work, Antonia! No time to dawdle!”

Antonia was proud to be part of the construction team. She couldn’t wait for their next job, because she had more treasures and more ideas to share!

Questions to talk about:
1. What do you think of Antonia’s ideas?
2. Did you like the story about Antonia? Why or why not?

I’ve listened to my child read the passage, and we’ve discussed the questions.

Date __________ Signed ________________________________

Optional Second Reading (initial here): __________
The Queen Ant was going to start laying eggs very soon, and the ant colony needed a new nursery. Building the new nursery was a hard job for the construction workers. Dirt had to be carried a long way out of the nest. One of the tunnels kept collapsing.

As the cleanup workers marched past the construction zone, Antonia had an idea. She stopped suddenly. The line of ants behind her zigged and zagged as her sisters ran into each other. They didn’t like that.

“There’s so much work to do!” they cried. Their antennas waggled up and down when they were excited. “Let’s get going! We’ve got to clean the Queen’s chamber, and the sleeping chambers, and the tunnels! No time to dawdle!”

But Antonia wanted to help the construction team. She had an idea! The drinking straw—it was sturdy and round. An ant could walk through it.

“How about using a straw to hold up the tunnel roof?” Antonia asked. At first the construction workers laughed. But then the crew leader said, “Time’s getting short! Let’s try Antonia’s idea.”

Questions to talk about:
1. What were the ants building? Why?
2. What problem did the construction workers have?
3. What was Antonia’s idea?
More Ant Facts

There are around 20,000 different kinds of ants. These amazing insects have been on Earth for millions of years. They can survive in any habitat except where the ground is frozen year round.

Like all living things, ants need other living things to survive. Just like people, these tiny insects live and work together in communities.

One ant, two ants, three ants, four,
My, oh my, there are hundreds more.
Hundreds and thousands of ants in a nest,
Working together is always best.

Questions to talk about:
1. How long have ants been on Earth?
2. Name two interesting facts about ants.

I’ve listened to my child read the passage, and we’ve discussed the questions.

Date __________ Signed ____________________________

Optional Second Reading (initial here): ________
The Lost Treasure

Antonia’s new treasure was lost. She looked everywhere for it. She ran down all the tunnels of the nest. She stopped at every room and stuck her head inside. She wiggled her antennas to pick up a smell. It wasn’t in the food storage rooms or in the sleeping chambers. She didn’t see or smell it in any of the nurseries. She went into the hospital and crawled underneath all the beds. She even looked in the trash chambers—yuck!

Finally, Antonia came to the Queen’s chamber. There it was—the dark blue hatpin! The Queen thought it was beautiful. Antonia was happy to give her treasure to the Queen.

Note: Numbers are for school use only.

Questions to talk about:
1. What was Antonia looking for?
2. Why did she wiggle her antennas?
3. Why did Antonia let the Queen keep the hatpin?