



Writers to Readers Weekly



Writers to Readers Weekly is a weekly newsletter for teachers of English, highlighting short works by contemporary writers for children and teens

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The World's Ugliest Living Thing?

Dog's Vomit Slime Mold, more accurately known as *Fuligo septica*, is a species of plasmodial slime mold, found in many areas of the world.

The most intriguing thing about slime molds, apart from their good looks, is that they have a very odd life cycle. Their life includes a more animal-like *motile* (moving) phase and a more plant like *immotile* (non-moving) phase.

Imagine one of these ugly blobs creeping up on you! Luckily they don't move very fast in their motile phase. Their top speed is about 1mm per hour.

What Are Slime Molds?

Firstly, slime molds aren't mold. Mold is a kind of fungus, but slime molds are something very different from fungus, so they don't fit into that kingdom. Not plant, not animal, not bacteria, they are so strange that they need at least two whole kingdoms just to classify them: Bikont and Amoebozoa. Both these groups also include single cell organisms, which slime molds are, or aren't, depending on how you look at them. Some people classify slime molds in the kingdom Protista, which just makes things more complicated!

Slime molds live part of their life as single cells, then they join up in one of two ways to become the large blobs that resemble vomit or scrambled eggs. Once in

this large group or blob, they start to move, digesting everything they slime over.

When it, or they, sense that their life cycle is ending, they stop moving, dry up and prepare to reproduce by releasing spores. Then it, or they die, and the spores blow away to find a new place to slime up.

Slime molds are found all over the world. They like organic food, so they live in the wild on forest floors or among dead tree debris. Because this kind of mulchy material is regularly used as garden fertilizer, slime molds are also often found in front yards and city parks. This sometimes causes some concern about the health of the local dogs!

Slime molds are never dangerous; some are even edible. Believe it or not, the Dog's Vomit Slime Mold is eaten in some places, scrambled into a dish called "Caca de Luna" which roughly translated means "Moon Poo". Yum!

If you should ever be so lucky to find a slime mold, don't run screaming, or look accusingly at your dog. Instead enjoy this most unusual life form for its, uh, *interesting* looks and fascinating life story.

By Gabrielle Prendergast
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About this week's author: G.S. (Gabrielle) Prendergast

Gabrielle Prendergast is an award winning writer, teacher and designer living in Vancouver, Canada. She writes picture books and middle grade and YA contemporary and historical as Gabrielle Prendergast. Her science fiction and fantasy is published as G.S. Prendergast. She has won the Monte Miller Award, the Westchester Fiction Award and The BC Book Prize as well as being nominated or short-listed for numerous other honors. Gabrielle has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and has taught writing at Sydney University, San Francisco State University, UBC, Royal Canadian College and at numerous conferences. www.gsprendergast.com



Writers to Readers Weekly Study Guide



Comprehension Questions:

1. What is the scientific name of Dog's Vomit Slime Mold?
2. What are the two life phases of Dog's Vomit Slime Mold?
3. How fast can Dog's Vomit Slime Mold move?
4. How and when do Dog's Vomit Slime Molds reproduce?
5. Where are Dog's Vomit Slime Molds found?

Discussion/Essay Questions:

1. In one to three paragraphs describe the entire life cycle of Dog's Vomit Slime Mold.
2. Write a paragraph or essay describing another species you think is "ugly". Suggestions: hagfish, blob fish, wolf spiders, vampire bats etc.
3. Slime mold live part of their life as single cells but when they join into groups, they move. What can we humans learn from them?

Vocabulary – Use each word in a sentence

Motile	Spores	Edible
Fungus	Debris	Accusingly

Books
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