Lesson 3.2
Walk in the Woods
Students read *Walk in the Woods* and discover that organisms called decomposers play a crucial role in the health of soil. Before reading, students reflect on the observations of soil samples they made in the previous lesson, and the teacher adds *soil* to the Matter chart to emphasize that soil, like all other parts of an ecosystem, is made of matter. Students read the book *Walk in the Woods* in pairs and record information about the different types of matter (living and nonliving things) in soil. Students discuss these ideas after reading and consider the meanings of the words *soil* and *decomposers*. At the end of the lesson, students synthesize ideas about what makes up soil, which will aid them as they continue to think about why soil can be different in different places. This lesson provides students with the opportunity to solidify their early ideas about ways in which the matter in soil can be different.

**Anchor Phenomenon:** The jaguars, sloths, and cecropia trees in a reforested section of a Costa Rican rain forest are not growing and thriving.

**Investigative Phenomenon:** The remains of a dead laurel tree, a California bay laurel leaf, and a gopher snake decompose into soil.

**Students learn:**

- Everything in the environment can become part of soil.
- Soil is made of matter from living and nonliving things in the environment.
- Decomposers are organisms that break down dead matter.
- Soil scientists study soil and look for evidence of soil being formed.
Partner Reading

Partners read *Walk in the Woods* and record information in their notebooks about the matter that makes up soil.

Instructional Guide

1. **Organize students into pairs and distribute books.** Give each pair one copy of *Walk in the Woods*.

2. **Partners read.** As students read, circulate to provide support as needed. Remind students to record in their notebooks what they are reading about the matter that makes up soil and to include the page numbers where they found that information. (You may wish to suggest that students do this as they read, or they can read the whole book first and then record information afterward, referring back to the text.)

Teacher Support

**Background**

*About the Book: Walk in the Woods*

*Walk in the Woods* follows a soil scientist named Asmeret Asefaw Berhe as she walks through the woods making observations. Berhe finds evidence of soil being formed from different kinds of matter. She knows that soil is a system made of different kinds of matter including 1) nonliving things such as rocks, 2) living things, and 3) the remains of dead organisms. Berhe looks for decomposers on the walk and describes the evidence that she sees of different kinds of common decomposers. *Walk in the Woods* provides students with an example of a real scientist who is looking for firsthand evidence in the natural world and investigating to find the answers to science questions. Students use this book to understand what kinds of matter make up soil as they begin to investigate the relationship between soil and plant growth. It also brings the forest ecosystem into the classroom through vivid photographs and descriptions.

**Instructional Suggestion**

*Literacy Note: Using Text Features*

The captions in *Walk in the Woods* provide a wealth of information about the process of decomposition. You may wish to encourage students to pay close attention to this text feature in order to get more information about what makes up soil. Depending on the needs of your students, this could take the form of a quick reminder to the class that captions are an important element of informational text, or you could choose to do more focused modeling and discussion of the captions in the book with a small group or with the whole class.
Synthesizing Ideas About What Makes Up Soil

1. As you read *Walk in the Woods*, think about the question below.
2. Record information in the boxes that will help you answer the question.
3. After you finish reading, connect ideas together to come up with a new understanding that answers the question.
4. Record your new understanding in the box below the arrow.

Question: What kind of matter makes up soil?

New understanding:
Partners read *Walk in the Woods* and record information in their notebooks about the matter that makes up soil.

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2. **Partners read.** As students read, circulate to provide support as needed. Remind students to record in their notebooks what they are reading about the matter that makes up soil and to include the page numbers where they found that information. (You may wish to suggest that students do this as they read, or they can read the whole book first and then record information afterward, referring back to the text.)

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Sintetizar ideas sobre qué constituye el suelo

1. A medida que lees *Un paseo por el bosque*, piensa en la pregunta debajo.
2. En los cuadros, apunta información que te ayudará a responder la pregunta.
3. Después de terminar el libro, conecta ideas para llegar a una nueva comprensión que responda la pregunta.
4. Apunta tu nueva comprensión en el cuadro debajo de la flecha.

Pregunta: ¿Qué tipo de materia constituye el suelo?

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Nueva comprensión