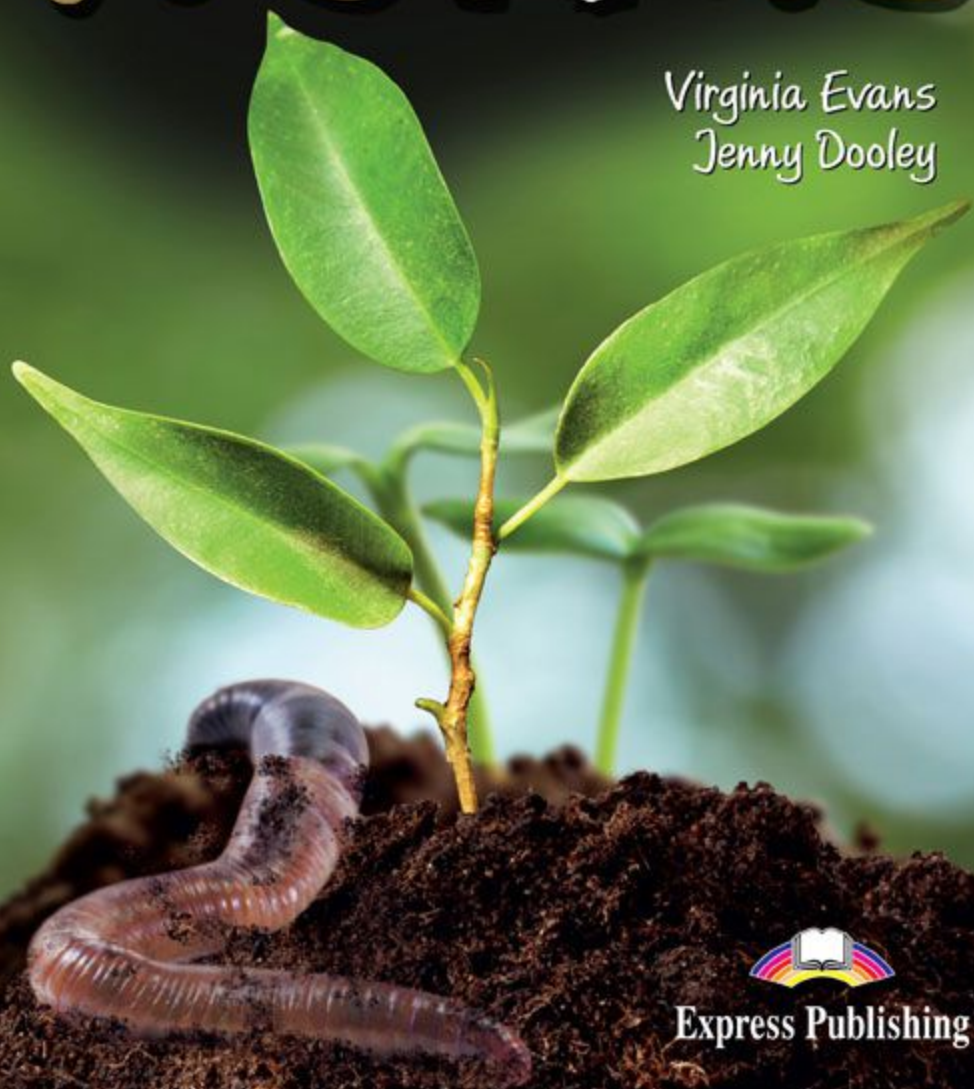


Worms

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Life

in the Ground

The next time you are outside, take a look at the ground below your feet. You may see dirt or rocks, but look a little bit closer. There is another world right under us. In this world, worms dig large burrows and help plants grow. Snails and slugs slowly creep along, leaving slimy trails behind them. Centipedes hunt for prey in the dark of night. The creatures under our feet are part of a complex world which has existed for millions of years, and there is much to learn about it.





Scientists have found that the origin of humans and most other living things may be an ancient worm. This species of worm – called *Pikaia gracilens* – lived five hundred million years ago. It lived in the oceans and looked like an eel. What does this worm have in common with humans? It had a very special feature: a backbone. It was the first animal on Earth in the chordate family. Animals in this family all have some type of backbone. This family today includes fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals. So in a way, worms are our ancestors!

