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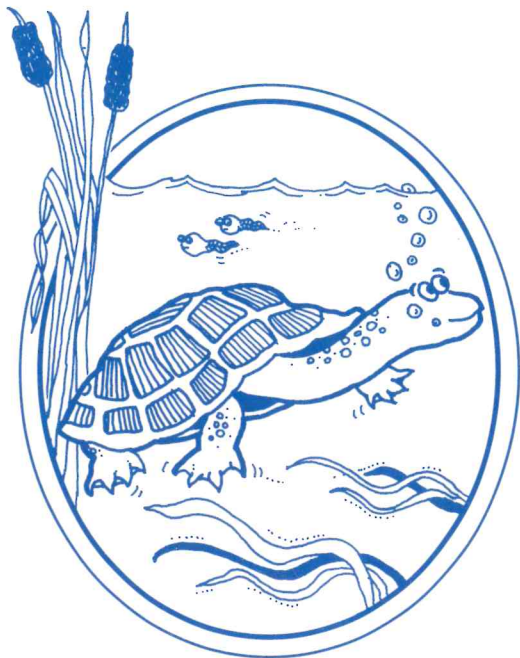


WETLAND EXPLORER

Thomas and the Magic Glow



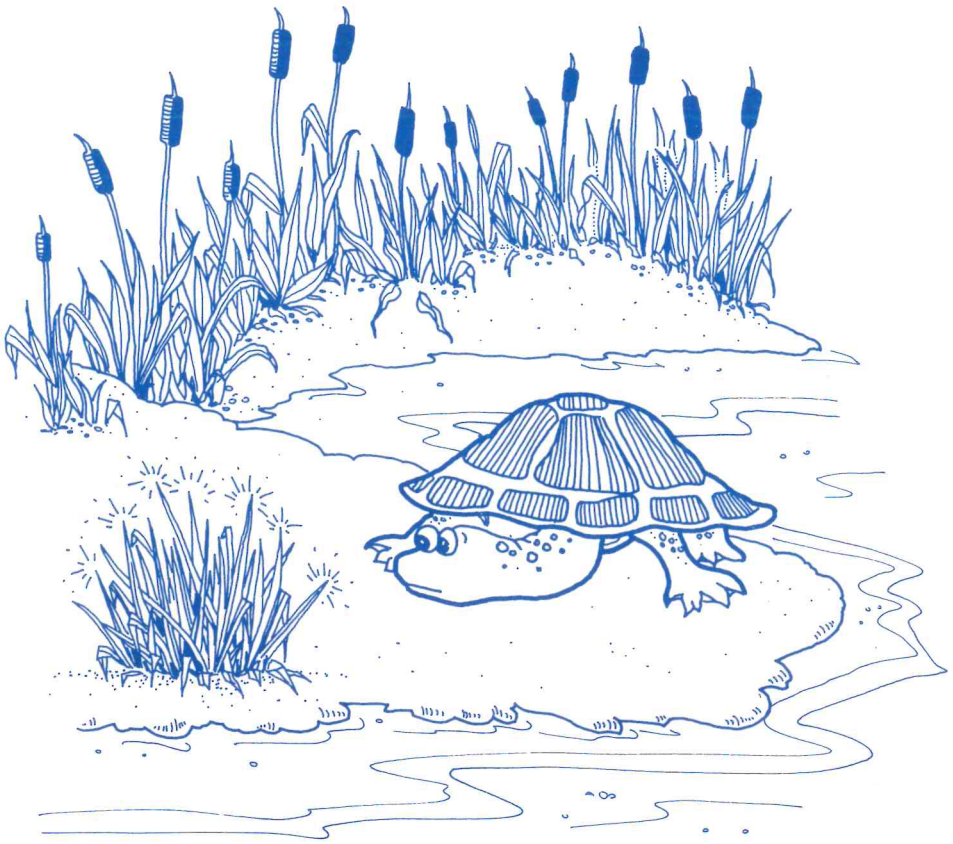
Department of Conservation and Land Management



WETLAND EXPLORER

Thomas and the Magic Glow

Written by Rae Burrows
Illustrations by Louise Burch

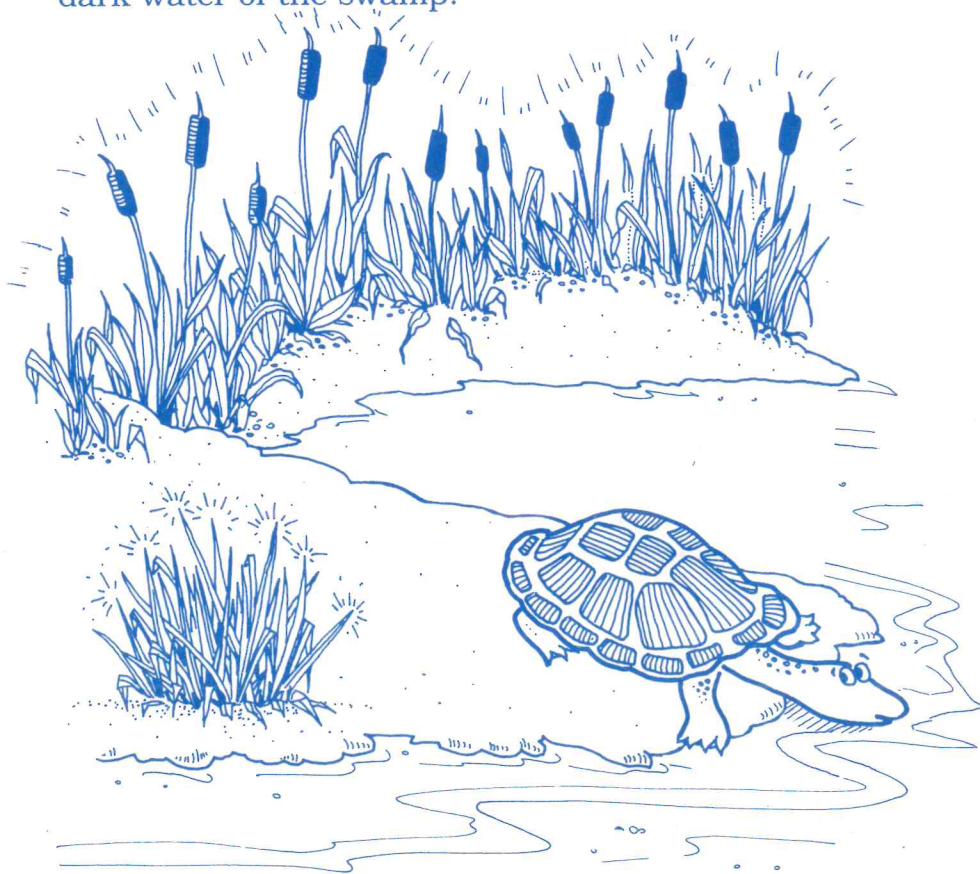


Thomas blinked with surprise. It seemed that the sharp sword grass in front of him was glowing with a light of its own.

The long necked tortoise looked carefully. He was lying in the sun on a mud bank and had just woken up from a lovely doze. He had never noticed anything particularly odd about the sword grass before. Sure, it had sharp edges and points and was to be avoided, but it had never seemed to shimmer like that.

Perhaps he had never really looked before. He took it for granted that there were different plants with different sizes, all different shapes and shades of green, but he'd never seen those tiny hairs on the leaf surfaces or the little spines along the edge of the blades of sword grass - or that glow that now, as he looked around, he noticed every plant had.

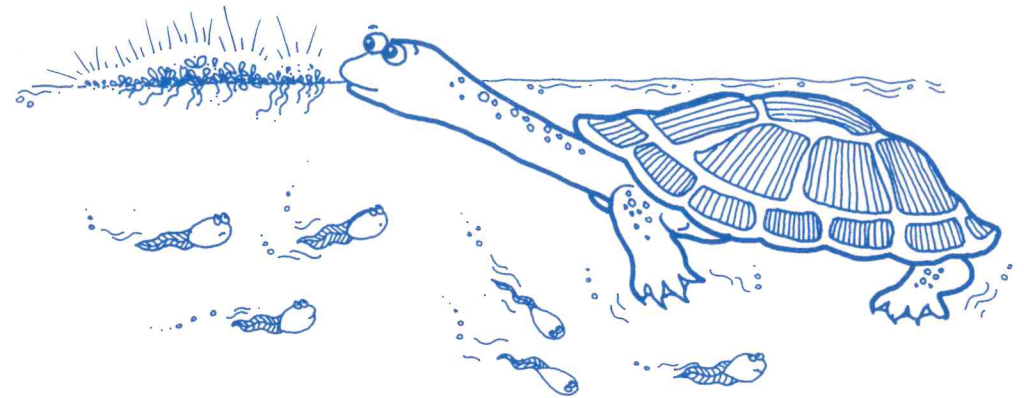
A little alarmed, Thomas lumbered back into the dark water of the swamp.



'I must have had too much sun,' he thought, shaking his head slowly.

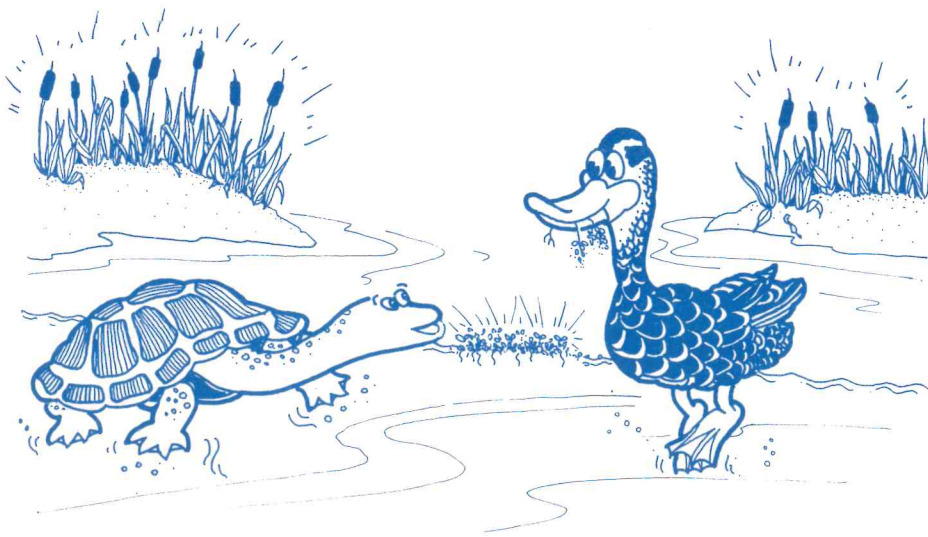
He glanced around looking for a snack to make him feel better. He spied some of his favourite weed and made his way over to it. To his amazement, these plants were glowing too! What was this strange light?

'What is making these plants shimmer like this?' Thomas asked some tadpoles swimming by.



'Don't bother us with such stupid questions,' said the tadpoles. 'We are much too busy feeding.'

'Yes, I suppose you are busy feeding,' said Thomas, angry at their rudeness. 'Feeding me, that is.' So saying, he gulped them down and smacked his lips appreciatively.



He swam on for a while until he met his friend the duck who was gobbling some of the floating water weed. Thomas was no longer surprised to see that this too was glowing.

'Have you noticed, my friend, that plants glow?'

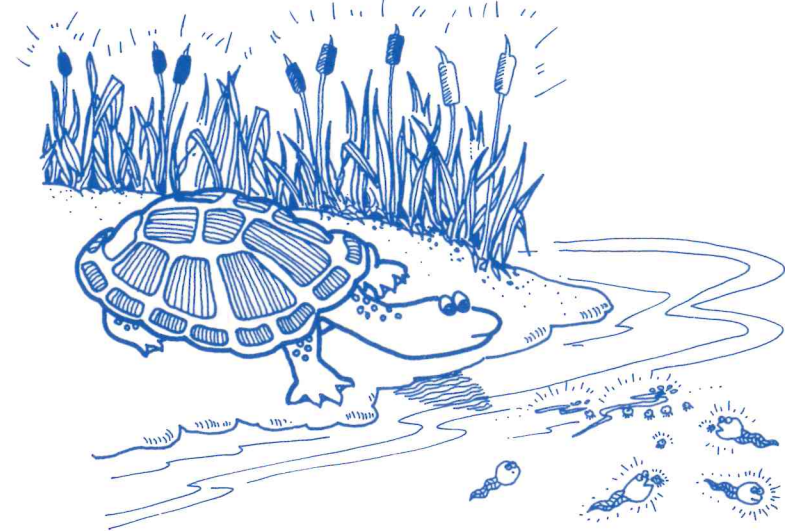
'Plants don't glow, Thomas,' said the duck, 'they grow - and very well too this season. They are very tasty.'

'But you must have noticed them shimmering,' Thomas persisted.

The duck looked troubled for a moment - long enough for Thomas to believe that she too had seen this strange event. He felt heartened. Perhaps he was not mad after all.

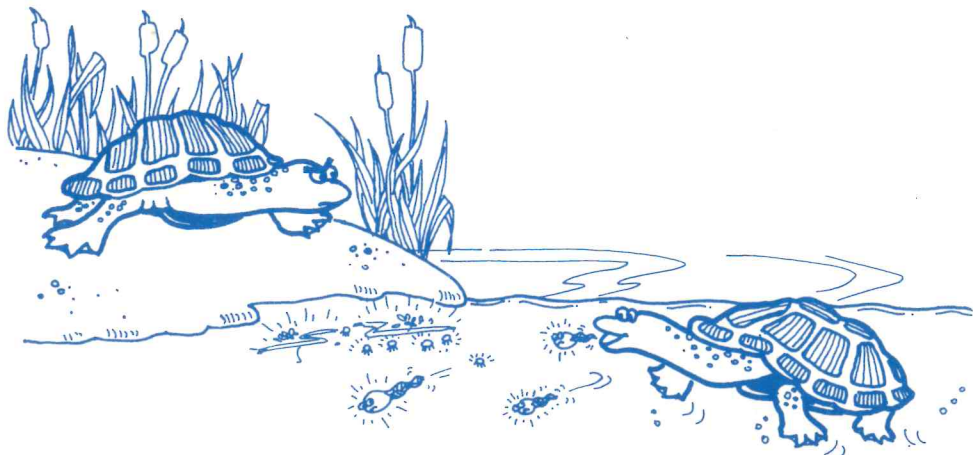
'Plants don't shimmer, Thomas - and if they did, so what anyway?' and the duck swam quickly away.

Thomas was devastated. He swam slowly back to his favourite spot - a soft warm muddy place which smelt rich and earthy. From there he watched the swamp community thoughtfully.



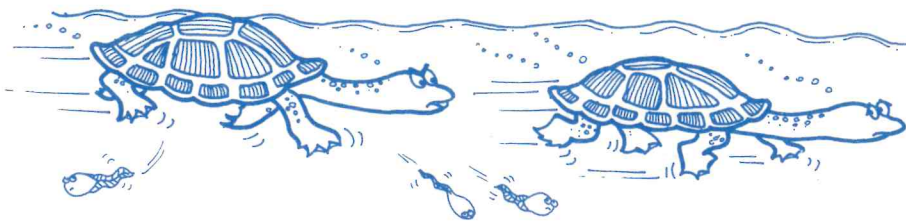
He watched the tiny, barely visible micro-bugs feeding on some shining duck weed. Each morsel of plant continued to glow as it was eaten. Thomas could just see a tiny dull glow in the tummies of the micro-bugs.

Tadpoles and insect nymphs floated into Thomas's sight. They were gobbling up hundreds of the micro-bugs. As they ate, Thomas saw that they too began to glow - only dully at first then more and more brightly as they ate more and more of the micro-bugs.



A neighbouring tortoise, out of his territory but unchallenged by Thomas this time, came into view and began snapping up tadpoles. (Thomas's tadpoles, Thomas silently noted. He must get even and eat some of Frederick's tomorrow.) Thomas watched while the glow that had once been a plant was passed from micro-bug to tadpole to Frederick.

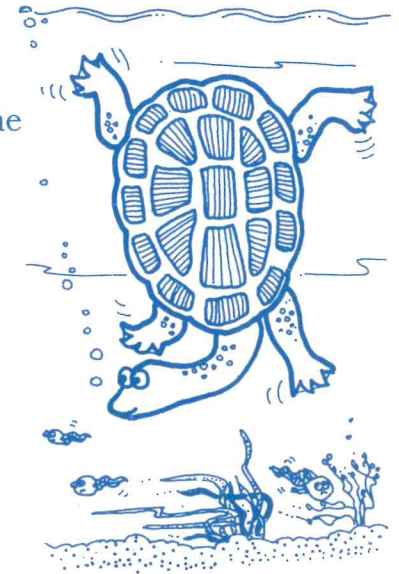
What was this glow? It didn't seem to harm anybody. On the contrary, it seemed to provide the various animals with strength to swim and enjoy life. Thomas noticed that he was feeling rather tired and listless. Was this because he had had so little to eat that day? He chased Frederick away from the tadpoles and ate them quickly. He felt better almost immediately.



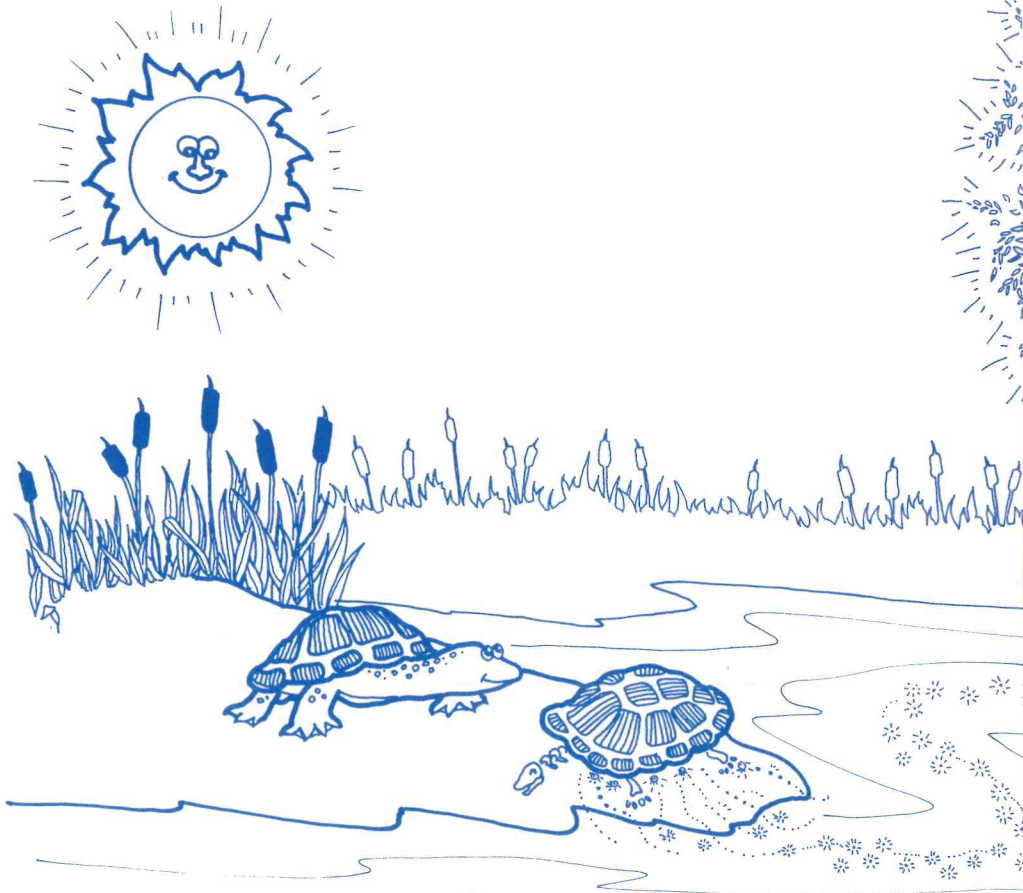
Thomas continued his normal tortoise life. He never mentioned the shimmering of the plants to anyone again, but he never stopped wondering about it. Where did it come from? What was it? Why did tiny micro-bugs immediately glow after eating plants whereas bigger animals had to eat lots before getting the same glow?

Many many years passed.

One day old Thomas came upon the body of Frederick tortoise. Thomas watched it lying there on the sand for some time. He noticed that it was slowly being eaten by micro-bugs. As they fed, these bugs dimly glowed too.



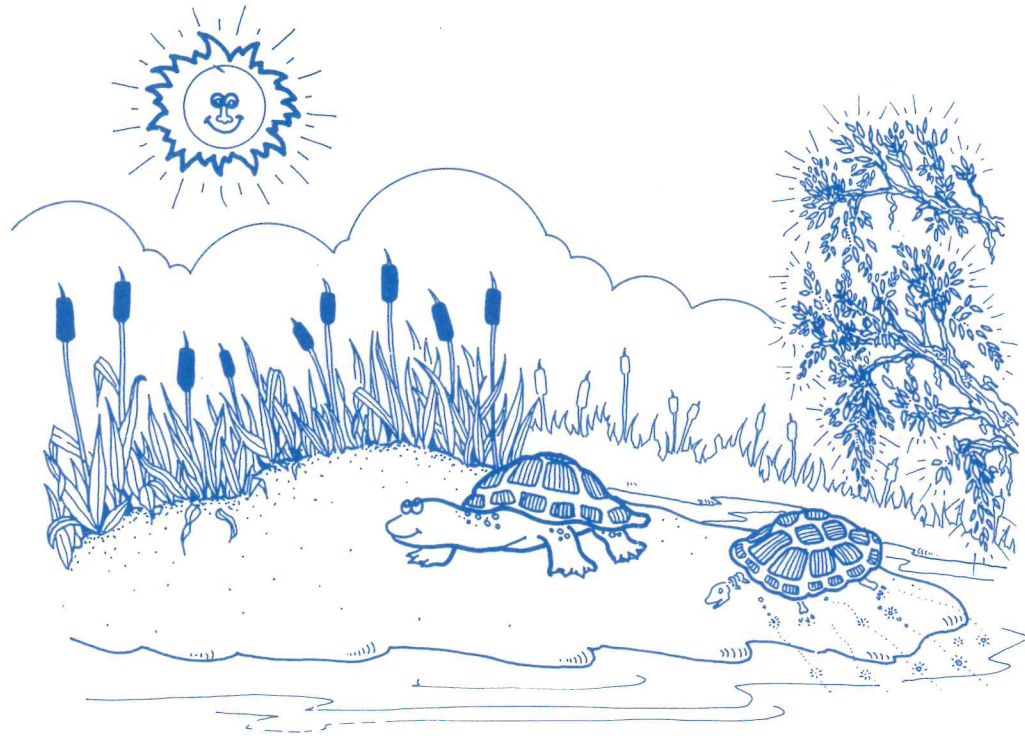
While he was watching, a shower of rain washed tiny parts of Frederick's body down into the soil. Some of these were then taken up by the roots of a young paperbark tree growing beside the swamp. As Thomas watched in amazement, these tiny particles were passed up through the roots to the trunk of the tree, then up to the branches and twigs. Finally they popped out into beautiful green leaves.



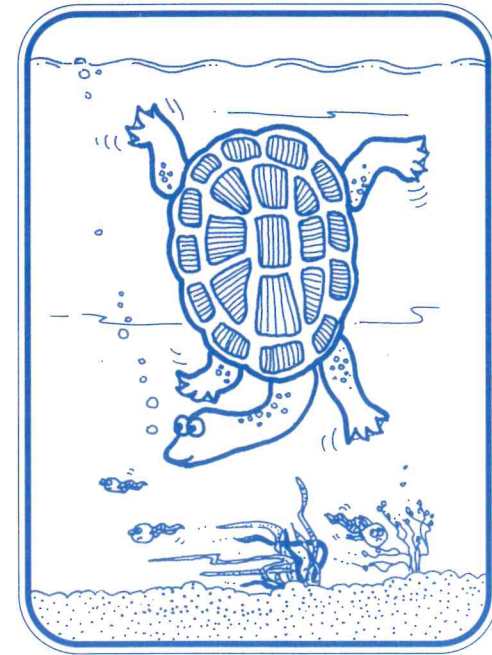
The leaves caught the sunlight streaming through the trees around the swamp. As they did so, something magical happened.

Inside each leaf the captured sunlight was transformed into a glowing morsel of food energy!





Thomas finally understood the reason for the shimmering of the plants and the glowing of the swamp creatures. The magic glow was sunlight energy which was changed into food energy in the leaves then passed from one life form to another, never being lost. It was essential to all life - in fact, the glow of life. Thomas was finally content. One day, perhaps soon, his body too would become a part of everything else in the swamp - just like Frederick's had.



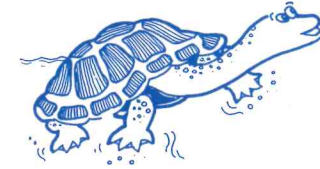
WETLAND EXPLORER ACTIVITIES

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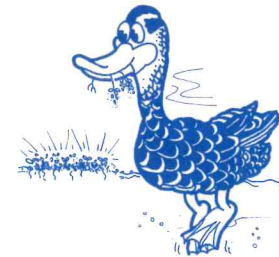
Use this space to make a map of Thomas's world. A few familiar spots to get you started will help. Places like your picnic or camping area, the creek, the direction of the sun, and a **'YOU ARE HERE'** sign.



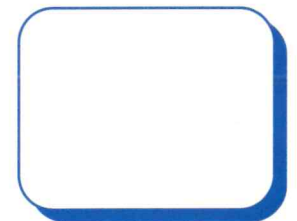
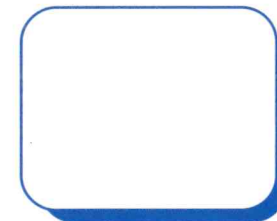
- ◆ See if you can find Thomas's resting place. Remember it is warm and squishy and smells rich and earthy. You can call it **THOMAS'S WALLOW**.



- ◆ Keep a lookout for the floating restaurant where the duck was gobbling water weed - and mark it on your map.

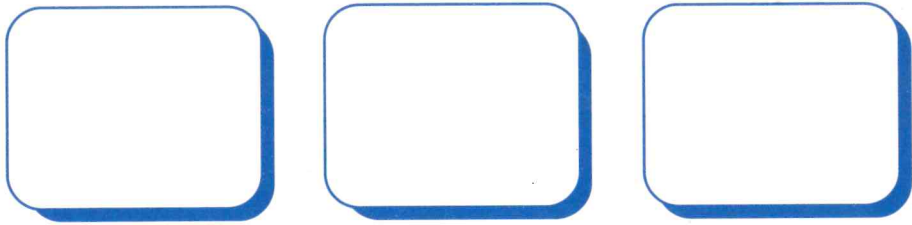


- ◆ Can you find any plants near the edge of the swamp which have little hairs or spines like the ones Thomas saw? If you can you may like to mark them on your map as prickly tickly spots and draw them below.



- ◆ If you can get a glass jar, swoop up some of the swamp water and find the tadpoles and insect nymphs that were gobbling up the micro-bugs. If you use a magnifying glass you may even be able to see some of the micro-bugs. You can draw them here, and mark the place on the map where you caught them as the **ENERGY SWAP PLACE**.

Actually, other places could be called this too.
Can you think of some?



- ◆ See if you can find Thomas's paperbark tree. You'll be able to tell that it's a paperbark because its soft white bark will peel off in thin paper-like strips. Treat the tree gently, though, remember Frederick may be part of it now.

You can mark it on the map as sun food - just to remind you of the magic the leaves perform.

