

ELINOR WONDERS WHY

EP 104A The House that Ants Built

By: Adam Ruben

Elinor's Question: How can tiny ants build such large anthills?

Logline: Elinor, Olive, and Ari disagree about the best way to build a couch cushion castle.

Curriculum Goals:

LS4. Begin to understand that animals and plants depend on other living things and nonliving things in the environment to meet some of their needs. (Elinor observes how the ants use twigs, sticks dirt and each other to build their nest)

ND3. (RTL Crosscutting concept 'Structure and Function')

Understand that structures and materials in the natural world can be used or can inspire the engineering of structures with similar function in the designed world (Elinor and her friends are inspired by the ant hill to design their pillow fort)

ET2. b. Use a variety of low-tech tools(Elinor uses her magnifying glass).

ET1. c. Begin to understand that engineering is a collaborative process during which ideas can be exchanged and shared with others while defining a problem and working to design, test and revise a solution. (Elinor and her friend collaborate to figure out a way to build their pillow fort).

SEP1b. Ask more complex questions about observable phenomena. (Elinor and her friends ask more complex questions about the ant hill)

Main Characters: Elinor, Olive, Ari

Secondary Characters: None

Incidental Characters: Ants

Backgrounds - Ant hill in Elinor's yard, Elinor's living room

Props - couch cushions, blankets, magnifying glass, twigs and leaf bits, book, leaf-on-a-stick flag

OUTLINE: December 13, 2018

FIRST DRAFT: January 4th, 2019

SECOND DRAFT: January 22nd, 2019

POLISH: February 11th, 2019

RECORD DRAFT: February 15th, 2019

1. EXT. ELINOR'S WINDOWSILL (TIGHT) - DAY

Open on an extremely close view of scurrying ANTS (Species: *Formica exsectoides*), carrying sticks, pine needles, and grass stems in a long line. We hear ELINOR narrating what she thinks the ants are saying, using a different cute voice for each ant.

1 ELINOR (V.O.) 1
 (a cute ant's voice))
I just loooove carrying stuff. Come
on, you guys!

Another ant scurries into view, following the first.

2 ELINOR (V.O.) 2
(another ant's voice)
Stay in line, everyone!

As the first two ants crawl off-screen, a third appears, lugging a stick with some difficulty.

3 ELINOR (V.O.) 3
(third ant's voice)
(grunting) This stick is too heavy
for me.

Another ant enters and grabs the other side of the stick.

4 ELINOR (V.O.) 4
(a low cute ant's voice)
Then I'll help you carry it!

The two ants begin to carry the stick.

2. INT. ELINOR'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The camera pulls back to reveal that the ants are on the outside of the windowsill, and then we see Elinor, resting on her elbows and staring at the ants. She has been narrating their thoughts all along, and she giggles at the silliness of it.

ANGLE ON: OLIVE and ARI enter the room, each carrying a comically tall stack of pillows and cushions. Elinor is so absorbed in the ants that she doesn't notice.

Olive drops her cushions in a pile in front of her. <SFX:
Plop!>

5 OLIVE 5
Here they are, Elinor! Every
cushion and pillow in your house!

Ari, nearly invisible behind his tall stack, bumps into the now-stopped OLIVE and drops everything onto his head.

6	Whoa!	ARI	6
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He pops up from inside the pile.

ARI (CONT'D) 7

Not to mention most of the
blankets.

Elinor, Ari and Olive <SFX: LAUGH WALLA>

8 ELINOR 8
Thanks, Olive! Thanks, Ari!

9 ARI 9
Is this enough to build our couch
cushion castle?

10 ELINOR 10
I hope so! Let me just get a few
more.

ANGLE ON: During the next lines of dialogue, ELINOR removes the cushions from the living room couch and stacks them next to Olive's.

11 ELINOR (CONT'D) 11
I have SO many different ideas for
the castle!

The view of the living room widens to make room for **ELINOR'S THOUGHT BUBBLE**, which appears next to her, filled with drawings of her plans in red crayon as she describes them.

12 ELINOR (CONT'D) 12
It's going to have a slide...and a
telescope...and a big window for
ant-watching!

Olive walks by a second time, balancing a new pillow on her head for fun.

13 OLIVE 13
I've got some ideas, too!

OLIVE'S THOUGHT BUBBLE appears, crowding out ELINOR's. It fills with drawings of what OLIVE describes, this time outlined in blue crayon.

14 OLIVE (CONT'D) 14
I want a room for my crayons...a
room for my sparkles...and a giant
room full of books!

15 ELINOR 15
You mean a library?

16 OLIVE 16
(excited)
Yes! My very own library!

The excitement is building for all of them, and ARI starts jumping from cushion to cushion.

17 ARI 17
Ooh! I have ideas, too!

ARI'S THOUGHT BUBBLE appears and crowds out Olive's, with his favorite design choices appearing in green crayon.

18 ARI (CONT'D) 18
I want a drawbridge...a
racetrack...and a BUBBLE FOUNTAIN!

He says this last line with such gusto that he jumps into the air, landing on a pile of more cushions. All three **THOUGHT BUBBLES BURST!**

19 ELINOR 19
(giggles)
Okay! Let's! Start! Building!

We see a series of shots of the three kids building their castles; <MFX: FORT BUILDING MUSIC>.

ANGLE ON: Elinor balances cushions by the window, then peeks to confirm she can still see the ants from the cozy nook she's created.

ANGLE ON: Ari drapes a blanket between two pieces of furniture and smiles at his new cave.

ANGLE ON: Olive lines up books on top of a cushion to make a bookshelf, then holds them in place with her hands while adding another cushion to the top with her trunk.

Everything is going well for the kids, who are pleased at their progress. But soon they encounter difficulties.

ANGLE ON: Elinor stacks three cushions of various sizes, looking a little unsure of how to do it, in an inverted triangle. It falls over. She frowns, then attempts it again. The structure stands for a moment, then topples once more.

ANGLE ON: Ari turns, struggling to pull a cushion triple the size of all the others off of the couch. (It's a big single cushion that runs the length of the couch; the cushions Elinor removed earlier were the individual upright cushions behind it. This cushion had been in the living room the whole time and was not one of the ones that he and Olive carried earlier.)

20 ARI 20
 (struggling to lift the
 cushion)
Augh!

ANGLE ON: Elinor balances a cushion to make a slide, but the moment her back is turned, Olive takes it. Elinor returns with a blanket to drape over her slide, but she notices that the slide is mysteriously gone. She then notices it in Olive's castle. <MFX: FORT BUILDING MUSIC fades.>

21 ELINOR 21
Olive, that's supposed to be my
slide.

Elinor puts her hands on the cushion, but Olive keeps holding it.

22 OLIVE 22
But it's the perfect shape for the
wall of my crayon room.

Olive gives the pillow a small tug, not mean-spiritedly, but she's clearly disappointed that she can't build her castle as planned.

23 ELINOR 23
But I need it for my slide.

Elinor doesn't let go. Ari pops up in the middle of his friends.

24 ARI 24
You guys, let's not fight over the
pillows.

Just then ELINOR loses her grip, and the pillow hits ARI gently in the chest and knocks him into a pillow.

Elinor and Olive look concerned for a beat. Ari jumps smiling.

25 ARI (CONT'D) 25
 (gleefully)
Never mind! Pillow fight!!!

*

26 ELINOR/OLIVE 26 *
PILLOW FIGHT!

The three kids playfully (and safely) bonk each other with pillows, giggling all the while. "Woo-hoo" "Take That!" *

This continues for a few seconds, and no one is hit in the head. However, some of the pillows they grab for the fight had been support structures for their castles.

When the fight is over, the kids collapse, laughing, with OLIVE and ARI on the floor and Elinor atop a pile of pillows next to the window. The laughter winds down. *

With a good view of the ants again, Elinor gets distracted and resumes watching them.

27 OLIVE 27
That was fun!

Ari sits up and looks around - their castle is now just a pile of pillows.

28 ARI 28
Yeah, but we haven't finished building our castle!

29 OLIVE 29
I think we need more cushions.

30 ARI 30
But I think we got all the ones small enough that we could carry.

PAN OUT TO: ELINOR isn't listening. She's back in her original pose, gazing at the ants out the window. OLIVE and ARI notice.

31 OLIVE 31
What do you think, Elinor?

Elinor does not answer, she's too busy looking at the ants.

32 ELINOR 32
(interested)
Hmmm...

33 OLIVE 33
Elinor?

Olive approaches Elinor.

34 OLIVE (CONT'D) 34
What are you looking at?

35 ARI 35
Whoa, are those ants?

ANGLE ON: Elinor stares at the ants as before, with Olive and Ari in the background.

36 ELINOR 36
Uh-huh. Look! They're all carrying
something.

37 Cool. ARI 37

Ari and Olive come closer to the windowsill.

38 OLIVE 38
They're carrying things, just like
we were carrying our cushions.

39 ELINOR 39
I wonder why they're doing that.

CLOSE UP: Elinor's face, staring in fascination at the ants.

40 ELINOR (CONT'D) 40
Where are they carrying all that
stuff?

Suddenly she springs up and runs toward the front door, grabbing a magnifying glass on the way out.

41 ELINOR (CONT'D) 41
Let's follow them outside. Come on!

Ari and Olive share a shrug, then follow Elinor out the door. Ari playfully bounces "boing" "pew" on a couple cushions on his way out.

3. EXT. ELINOR'S YARD - CONTINUOUS

CU: The ants busily transport useful bits down their line. Behind them, we see ELINOR running up, her face peering over their ranks. ARI and OLIVE soon join her.

ANGLE ON: The three kids studying the line of ants. It's a long, long line!

42 ELINOR 42
There are so many!

Excited ad libbing continues as the kids follow the ant line: around Elinor's house, through the garden, up - and abruptly back down - a wall, diverted around a puddle.

At one point, they pass the magnifying glass from Elinor to Olive to Ari. Elinor and Olive use it to examine the ant line, while Ari makes a silly face that he magnifies to make Elinor and Olive laugh.

Finally they arrive at the anthill, NOTE: Formica exsectoides do build really huge anthills out of sticks, pine needles and dirt, but we may not want to make our anthill so big it is distracting. Assuming the big anthills start out small, you can basically make this anthill whatever size makes sense for design.

43 OLIVE 43
Wow, look at that!

44 ARI 44
This is why the ants were carrying
all those sticks and leaves!
They're building something.

45 ELINOR 45
It looks like they're building a
hill. But... how can those tiny
ants build something so much bigger
than them?

46 OLIVE 46
It's an anthill! I read about it in
one of my books. I'll go get it!

Olive runs back into the house to retrieve the book. CU:
While they wait, Elinor and Ari study the ants entering and
leaving the anthill.

47 ARI 47
Whoa... Look, you can see the ants
going in and out of the hill!

Elinor resumes her ant-narration voice. CU on the ants as
their voices are narrated, though not quite as close as
before. This way Elinor and Ari can be seen a bit, so it's
clear they're narrating the ant voices.

48 ELINOR 48
(ant voice)
Look at this big hill we built! And
I'm just a little ant!

Having heard her ant voice for the first time, Ari giggles.

49 ARI 49
(trying out his own ant
voice)
(MORE)

ARI (CONT'D)

If you're an ANT, then I must be an
UNCLE!

50 ELINOR 50
 (giggles, then ant voice)
Look! I'm waving my ANT-enna!

51 ARI 51
 (ant voice)
And I'm not wearing p...ANTS!

They laugh, while Olive returns behind them with her satchel
over her shoulder.

52 OLIVE 52
 I've got it! It's here in my
Nature Book.

OLIVE removes a book from her satchel, then holds it up,
showing a BIG PICTURE OF AN ANTHILL.

53 OLIVE (CONT'D) 53
 There's a part here that's all
about ants!

ANIMATED STORYBOOK ILLUSTRATION: We pan around a simply
animated cutaway of an anthill, showing the various chambers
as Olive narrates. The illustrations are cartoony and fun but
not overly anthropomorphic: nurse ants tending little pupae,
ants snoozing in a sleeping chamber, ants retrieving food
from an ant pantry.

54 OLIVE (V.O.) 54
 Lots of ants live in big places
called anthills. Most anthills are
made of dirt, but some also use
sticks and pieces of grass.
Anthills have rooms for sleeping,
rooms for taking care of babies,
and even special places where they
keep the trash.

BACK TO the three kids staring at the anthill.

55 ELINOR 55
 Wow! Is that all happening INSIDE?

56 OLIVE 56
 Yup! Most of the anthill is under
the ground. It's kind of like we're
looking at the roof.

CU: The anthill, where an ant pokes itself out from between
the thatching on the side.

Then a large stick (large to the ant) is placed gently next to the ant, which regards it curiously.

Zoom out to see that Elinor is holding the stick, smiling, trying to entice the ant to crawl on it. The ant does, then runs off, which makes Elinor giggle.

57 ELINOR 57

That is SO INTERESTING! But...how
can these tiny ants make a hill so
much bigger than them?

58 ARI 58
Yeah, especially when WE can't even
build a pillow castle. And we're
BIG!

59 OLIVE 59
 (flipping through the
 book)
 Hmm. I'm not sure.

60 ELINOR 60
Let's watch the ants, and maybe we
can figure it out! We need MORE
OBSERVATIONS!

They all lie down, elbows on the ground and sharing the magnifying glass, to observe. ANGLE ON: the ant line in the foreground with the kids in the background. We see what Elinor was watching at the beginning: ants scurrying busily, many of them carrying sticks, pine needles, etc.

61 ELINOR (CONT'D) 61
Look, the ants walk in a line to
bring things back and forth from
the anthill.

62 OLIVE 62
They aren't bumping into each
other, like we did.

CU: An ant enters pulling on a stick. The stick is larger than anything they've seen the ants moving so far.

63 ELINOR 63
And look! That ant is having
trouble carrying that stick - it's
so BIG!

The kids watch as TWO more ants scurry in and help carry the large stick together.

64 ELINOR, OLIVE, ARI 64
 Oh!/Look!/She got help!

65 OLIVE 65
 The ants are helping each other.
 More ants means they can carry
 bigger things!

66 ARI 66
 Yeah, I wish someone had helped *me*
 with the big couch cushion before.
 It was really heavy!

ANGLE ON: Elinor absorbing all this information.

67 ELINOR 67
 Hmmm.

Ari rises, dusting off his knees, followed by Olive.

68 ARI 68
 Wow, these guys are f-ANT-astic!
 They help each other carry the
 sticks...

69 OLIVE 69
 And they don't fight over the
 things they bring!

70 ARI 70
 They make the anthill TOGETHER.

Elinor's face suddenly lights up and she leaps up; she has
an idea!

71 ELINOR 71
 That's it! I know how we're going
 to build our castle!

72 OLIVE 72
 How, Elinor?

73 ELINOR 73
 We have to act like ants!

Mirroring her sudden run out the door, she suddenly runs back
inside. Ari and Olive once again look at each other, smile,
and shrug, then follow Elinor back inside.

CROSSFADE TO:

4. INT. ELINOR'S LIVING ROOM - A BIT LATER

ELINOR, OLIVE, and ARI once more stand in ELINOR's living room, next to the pile of cushions.

74 ELINOR 74
Okay, ANT BUILDERS! Let's build our
castle!

COOPERATIVE CASTLE BUILDING MONTAGE

The kids sing as we show a montage of them planning and working together on their castles. They also do a few silly things, like pretending to crawl in a line while carrying pillows on their backs.

ANGLE ON: Elinor revisits her three couch cushions of different sizes. But before stacking them, Olive shows her a small drawing she made of the three cushions stacked in a triangle. Olive helps Elinor stack the cushions the new way, and this time the cushions don't topple.

75 ELINOR (CONT'D) 75
(singing)
It's everyone, it's not just me
who builds a castle carefully.

76 OLIVE 76
 (singing)
 'Cause when you stop and think it
 through, it helps to know just what
 to do.

ANGLE ON: Ari once again tries to remove the giant cushion from the couch, but he can't - until Elinor and Olive come over. Together, the three of them carry the cushion and place it as a wall in the castle.

77 ARI 77
 (singing)
So if I need the biggest cushion,

78 ELINOR, OLIVE 78
 (singing)
 We'll be helping you with the
 pushing.

79 ARI 79
 (singing)
 'Cause doing it together's fun

80 ELINOR, OLIVE, ARI 80
 (singing)
And three ants can lift more than
one!

ANGLE ON: The three kids draw their castle together on a single piece of paper, gesturing at each other's contributions with excitement. We can't see what they're drawing yet, but it's evident that they're working together on a single design.

ALL: Let's work together!
Let's work together!
That's the way we do it better.
ARI: An ant can't do it all alone.
(big finish)
But we can do it... TOGETHER!

END MONTAGE: When the song ends, the castle is nearly finished, and they look at it proudly, hands on hips. (Note: The final shot of the song is deliberately a tight shot on the three kids that doesn't allow us to see the castle yet.)

81 ARI 81
We worked together just like the
ants!

82 OLIVE 82
Yeah! We helped each other, and we
shared the pillows...

83 ELINOR 83
...and we made an amazingly awesome
incredible ANT HILL CASTLE!

We reveal their castle, which looks a bit stylistically incoherent, but still magnificent! In fact, it looks a little like an anthill!

Elinor runs to her slide.

84 ELINOR (CONT'D) 84
I got my slide!

85	OLIVE	85
	I got my library!	

86 ARI 86
And I got my drawbridge!

87 ELINOR 87
Ants, we've got one more piece to
move!

She indicates the largest pillow (the one ARI couldn't lift before), and together the three of them hoist it on top of the castle: the roof!

88 OLIVE, ARI 88
 (ad lib)
 Perfect! / This is awesome!

89 ELINOR 89
 All ants into the castle!

The kids laugh, then eagerly play in their new castle. *

SEGMENT 2.

1. INT CLASSROOM -- DAY

We open on Ms Mole standing near her desk. Ari and Elinor rush into the frame.

90 ARI 90
 Ms Mole! We have a question that we
 HAVE to ask you! About ANTS!

91 MS. MOLE 91
 Oh my! I do love questions from my
 little scientists.

92 ELINOR 92
 We saw some ants walking together
 and they looked so much alike we
 thought they might be brothers.

93 OLIVE 93
 Or sisters!

94 ARI 94
 And THEN we wondered: do ants even
 HAVE brothers and sisters?

Ms Mole smiles.

95 MS. MOLE 95
 That's a wonderful question! AND it
 reminds me that it's time for our
 story, which is all about ANT nests
 and FAMILIES. Ants DO have brothers
 and sisters! And MOTHERS too!

Ari looks surprised.

96 ARI 96
Whoa. Just...like...me.

Olive and Tito Mouse come to join them. Ms Mole turns to her desk, and we see a really long book lying closed with drawings of ants on the cover.

97 OLIVE 97
That's a big book!

98 MS. MOLE 98
Yes, it has lots of ANTS-ers in it.
Get it? ANTS-ers. About ANTS.

The kids <SFX: GIGGLE WALLA>.

Tito and Ari help get the book open. Tito Mouse ends up holding on to the edge and gets lifted into the air as it opens.

On the first page of the book, we see the top of an anthill above ground.

99 ARI 99

Why is the book so big, Ms. Mole?

100 MS. MOLE 100
I'll show you! See, the ant nest
looks quite small on top of the
ground, right? Well, watch THIS!

Ms. Mole reaches under the page, and the long page unfolds down, revealing a cutaway view that shows the long underground tunnels leading down. The kids <OOHHH...>

101 MS. MOLE (CONT'D) 101
Ant nests are really big under the
ground! There's room for THOUSANDS
of ants.

ANGLE ON: The book illustration animates and we see lots of little ants scurrying around. (The ants are realistically depicted.)

102 ELINOR 102
Wow! Look at them all!

We zoom in on a room with one ant that's bigger than the others by 2-3x.

103 OLIVE 103

Why is that ant so much bigger than
the others, Ms. Mole?

104 MS. MOLE 104
Because that big ant is the MOTHER
of the smaller ants.

We see the worker ants crawling around and on top of her.

105 OLIVE 105
Does she take care of them?

106 MS. MOLE 106
Actually, the little workers take
care of their mother. She's called
the QUEEN ANT.

We see the little ants bringing her food.

107 OLIVE 107
The queen! Really? Does she get to
wear a crown?

108 MS. MOLE 108
No, but she gets to spend all day
with her helpful children!

109 ARI 109
So all those ants are brothers and
sisters!?

110 MS. MOLE 110
Yes! They are one VERY BIG family.

The ants snuggle in a bit to the queen.

Back to the kids:

111 ELINOR 111
I wonder what it's like to have so
many brothers and sisters.

112 OLIVE 112
I wonder what its to have a queen

FADE OUT, THE END.