



The Nature Explore Adventure Activities included in this resource are experiences that used to be part of everyday family life. We know though, because of a variety of reasons, that many children and adults no longer experience regular time in nature.

These Adventure Activities provide an initial focus, or stepping off point, to gently guide adults and children in joyful and meaningful interactions with nature. Over time and frequent supported outings, nature can again become part of children's everyday lives.

Research shows that children benefit greatly from connecting to nature. Benefits include:

- Deepened sense of wonder, inspiring lifelong learning
- Strengthened observation and critical thinking skills
- Enriched learning through multi-sensory experiences
- Strengthened powers of imagination and creativity
- Hands-on enjoyment and caretaking, inspiring tomorrow's generation of environmental stewards

ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:

- 1 GET TO KNOW A TREE
- 2 A LEAF SHAPE ADVENTURE
- 3 YOUR VERY OWN STORY
- 4 YOUR SPECIAL PATH
- 5 ANIMAL SIGNS
- 6 TEXTURE ADVENTURE
- 7 WHAT CAN YOU SEE IN A CLOUD?
- 8 WHAT IS BEAUTIFUL TO YOU?
- 9 COLORS IN THE WORLD
- 10 THE WONDER OF TREES
- 11 SHAPES IN NATURE
- 12 ANIMAL CLUES
- 13 HIDDEN PICTURES HUNT
- 14 AMAZING SEEDS
- 15 ANIMAL HOMES

GETTING STARTED...

These **Adventure Activities** support a wide range of ages, interests and abilities. Children are able to develop skills and understandings in many areas of development at the same time as they engage in personally meaningful explorations of the world around them. The richest kind of learning happens in this holistic way. Truly deep learning also happens when children are highly motivated to gain information and then communicate their understandings back to others. Learning is powerfully supported by having shared experiences with others.

Review the **Facilitator Notes** that coincide with each Adventure Activity. These will help you choose a location to explore and plan for materials to bring with you. They also offer some suggestions for supporting a variety of age groups, related children's books and additional adult resources.

Decide if you want to print one Adventure Activity for each child. They are designed so that young children can understand the prompts and older children can read them.

Outdoor spaces filled with "nature's treasures" provide an ideal venue to show children that the world is a good place. As children have the time and space to connect with nature and to find out and express who they uniquely are, they grow up knowing the world as a place full of wonder, a place worth learning about, a place worth caring for and protecting.

The approach to environmental education through these activities is less about imparting factual information to children and more about free discovery on each child's own terms. Personal perceptions, attitudes, and connections with nature are the key goals, and facilitating positive experiences varies from child to child.

The original content material for Adventure Activities 1-9 was compiled in collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension and 4-H Office.



VISUAL CLUES

These symbols can be found throughout the **Adventure Activities** and provide visual clues to guide children in their exploration.



LOOK



SMELL



HEAR



TOUCH



MOVE



GET TO KNOW A TREE

Choose a tree in the area that you think is interesting. Use your senses to get to know your tree! Here are some ideas.



LOOK CLOSELY...
do you see any shapes?



TOUCH YOUR TREE...

how does it feel?



LISTEN...

does your tree or anything in it make sounds?



SMELL...

does it make you think of anything that you have smelled before?

If you pay close attention, you might find some **"TREASURES OF NATURE"** in your tree. Place a cloth or towel under the tree. What do you predict might fall on the cloth?

You might find...



BUGS?



PODS?



NUTS?

Have an adult shake a branch of your tree and see what falls out. Were your predictions correct?

GET TO KNOW A TREE

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

This activity can be done anywhere...it can even be a good introduction to your own Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom. Other possible locations could be a neighborhood park or green space, local zoo, nature center, or botanical garden. It is good to teach children that nature is everywhere. It can be fun and surprising to see what natural treasures you can find almost anywhere if you take the time to slow down, look closely, and enjoy!

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #1 **Get To Know A Tree**
- A sheet or towel to place under a tree. If working with families, you could ask them to bring their own.

"I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil."

—Rachel Carson,
The Sense of Wonder

Links to Good Books

Any good storybook that encourages children to use their senses or to observe carefully fits well with this activity. Doing an activity like this fuels children's natural curiosity and inspires children to find out more information about what they are observing on their own. Also, finding "fact books" to learn what kind of insect or nut the child saw is a fun extension to what they have already done and a very meaningful way to learn.

Some good books are:

- *Have You Seen Trees?* by Joanne Oppenheim
- *Hello Tree* by Joanne Ryder
- *A Tree is Nice* by Janice May Udry

Adaptations

Young children explore the world around them by touching, smelling, and examining things to make their own discoveries. Children communicate what they are learning when they share the experience with observant adults. For example, if a non-verbal child picks up two different leaves and holds them up to look at them, this is an opportunity for the adult to comment on the child's discovery, "Oh! You found two leaves that are different!" With a verbal child, the adult can encourage descriptions of similarities and differences in the leaves. Adults need to watch and listen to children closely to learn about their discoveries.

Additional Resources and Support

- www.childrenandnature.org This website has two annotated bibliographies of research related to the importance of connecting children and nature.
- www.hookedonnature.org This website has resources for educators working with young children.



A LEAF SHAPE ADVENTURE

*Use your senses to learn more about leaves.
Take a walk and collect leaves that are
interesting to you.*



Are your leaves the same shape?



What colors do you see in your leaves?



How do your leaves feel?



How do your leaves smell?

A LEAF SHAPE ADVENTURE

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

Fall is a nice time of year to look closely at leaves, especially if they are turning colors. Parks and nature centers that have a variety of tree leaves to compare are great places to try this activity. It is a good idea to remind your group to only pick up leaves off the ground and not to pick from trees to demonstrate respect for all living things.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #2 **A Leaf Shape Adventure**
- Leaf rubbings are an extension of this activity. If you choose to do rubbings you will need to bring paper and crayons, and plan for a hard surface to work on. These rubbings could be added to a nature portfolio.

Links to Good Books

Field guides that identify species of trees by their leaves would be a good resource for families interested in learning more.

Some good books are:

- *Leaf Man* by Lois Ehlert
- *Look What I Did With A Leaf* by Morteza E. Sohi
- *Autumn Leaves* by Ken Robbins
- *Leaf Jumpers* by Carole Gerber

“Look deep, deep into nature and then you will understand everything better.”

–Albert Einstein

Adaptations

For children age 2 and under it may be best to look closely at just 2 leaves at a time. You might help the children hold a leaf in each hand while doing this activity. Jumping in a pile of leaves can be a fun part of this activity as well. Remember that young children learn, in part, by moving. Non-verbal children can show you they know leaves make noise by stomping on them to hear them crunch. Watch their faces when they smell and touch their leaves and comment on what you see happening. This is a great way to introduce new vocabulary to children!

Unstructured play in nature encourages the healthy development of senses. Adults can encourage children to use their senses when they are playing together outdoors by doing it themselves and by talking about it!

Additional Resources and Support

- “Leaf Adventures for Little Kids” by Kay Antunez California PLT (November 2006)
- **www.arboday.org** This website has a wealth of information on trees as well as ideas for connecting children with nature.
- **www.audubon.org** Click on regional resources. This website has a directory of Audubon nature centers and activities. You can check for one in your area.



YOUR VERY OWN STORY

Go for a walk in nature. Look for a place that catches your attention. Use your imagination and what you know about nature to create a story. Try taking turns adding what happens next, or even tell a story with a song. Here are some story and song starters you could try.



Once upon a time, a family of frisky squirrels...



Wow! This old tree has been home for lots of animals, including...



I see ants crawling around this place. Maybe they are getting ready for a party! I remember a song about ants... "*The ants go marching one by one...*"



I see matted down grass. A deer slept here last night and...

YOUR VERY OWN STORY

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

Go to any place that inspires you. Groups of families might enjoy bigger and more natural areas so that families can spread out and find their own *niche*. A prairie, a large wooded area or a lakeshore are great places to do this activity.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #3 **Your Very Own Story**
- For some young children it may be helpful to bring along puppets to use as props.

Links to Good Books

Oral storytelling is becoming a lost art. It is powerful for children to hear stories from their families and other caring adults. Whether the stories are made up and just for fun or true stories about growing up, we all need to be reminded to share our stories. It also impacts children when they are listened to closely. In our hurried world, it is good to slow down and take time to *really* listen to the stories children have for us.

Some good books are:

- *In the Forest* by Marie Hall Ets
- *The Growing Story* by Ruth Krauss
- *My Father's Hands* by Joanne Ryder
- *Blueberries for Sal* by Robert McCloskey

Adaptations

Some adults may feel uncomfortable and unsure about making up a whole story. Letting them know they can sing a song or use a puppet as a prop can be helpful. These supportive strategies can also be effective for children with language delays. Children who are especially visual-spatial and kinesthetic learners may enjoy acting-out their story. You may wish to record your child's story in writing on a sheet of paper to retell to the group or at home.

Additional Resources and Support

- *Learning With Nature Idea Book* by Valerie Cuppens, Nancy Rosenow, Jim Wike / Nature Explore
- *Fostering a Sense of Wonder during the Early Childhood Years* by Ruth Wilson

“What we remember from our childhood we remember forever—permanent ghosts, stamped, inked, imprinted, eternally seen.”

—Cynthia Ozick



YOUR SPECIAL PATH

Take a walk in nature and hunt for interesting things. As you explore, let your senses go to work. Really listen, look, smell and feel! Make mental notes of things most interesting to you. Later you will make a "map" of your special path.



Observe details.



Try changing your perspective...climb a tree or pretend to be a bug on the ground.



Does anything you touch or smell remind you of another time or place you have been outdoors?



Now make a "map" that is representative of your walk experience. The map may have symbols or lines representing a path, or landmarks drawn on it.



YOUR SPECIAL PATH

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Location Ideas

Areas with a variety of terrain are good for this activity. Look for a place that has hills, some vegetation for cover, and a variety of surfaces like grass, rocks, water or even bridges or other man made structures. Easily recognizable landmarks are helpful, such as a unique tree or a pond. Remind children and families that the path they create should not disturb the natural area (i.e., avoid breaking branches, etc.)

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #4 **Make A Path**
- One fun possibility is to try this activity in the evening. After a path has been marked, adults can line it with tea lights that have been lit. This allows families to move through the area at dusk and enjoy changes that occur at that time of day.

“Many children today find it easier to stay indoors and watch television. I worry that children do not know what they are missing. Children cannot love what they do not know. They cannot miss what they have not experienced.”

–Mary Pipher

Links to Good Books

This is an opportunity to talk about familiar paths like the trip to school and home, trip to the mailbox, and the path from the kitchen to the bedroom. Resource books such as atlases, maps, and even ski slope maps can be used to spur interest in this topic.

Some good books are:

- *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchinson
- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson
- *The Secret Birthday Message* by Eric Carle

Adaptations

For this activity, think about people with physical challenges and strollers. Try to find an area that is partially wheel chair accessible. Encourage adults to take children out of strollers and if they can walk or crawl, let them do so for at least part of the time. Remember that this does not need to be a long or strenuous path, just an interesting one!

Another way children map is to include descriptive words or it may consist of movements that can be acted out, like the child shown mimicking a tree he saw on his walk. Acting is a great way for young children to show us what they know.

Additional Resources and Support

- *The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places* by Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble
- *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education* by David Sobel



ANIMAL SIGNS

Try to find animal signs during your nature hike.
Tracks can be found in the snow or muddy places.

LOOK... When you find some tracks notice if the front and back feet are the same size and shape?



How do animals know you have been here? Make your own tracks.



LISTEN... Do you hear any animal sounds? Listen for nibbling, singing, or calling.



Animals have homes, too. Look high and low to find places where animals live while you are on your walk.



ANIMAL SIGNS

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Location Ideas

This is a great activity to try in the snow if your climate permits. Any location will work as long as wildlife is present. Water sources such as streams and creeks are likely places animals visit year round. You may be surprised at the number of animal tracks you can find in snow and mud. Birds can leave not only footprints but their wings can also leave patterns in the snow. Encourage children and families to walk carefully so tracks are left undisturbed.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #5 **Animal Signs**
- If you choose to do this activity in the winter in a cold climate it is important to really encourage families to dress appropriately. It will make your time outside much more enjoyable!

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.”

–John Muir

Links to Good Books

Many animal track books are available for reference and some children, especially older ones, are interested in identifying animals by their tracks. *In the Forest* is a picture book that shows animals and their tracks in a lively, fun format and there is an accompanying *Nature's Footprints Field Guide*.

Some good books are:

- *The Mitten* by Jan Brett
- *Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats
- *Animal Houses* by Aileen Fisher
- *Nuts To You* by Lois Ehlert
- *Leaf Jumpers* by Carole Gerber

Adaptations

Please remember it is very important that people in your group are prepared for all kinds of weather so they can enjoy their experience. Infants who are not exerting energy walking are more susceptible to cold than adults and children who are moving around. Always go with the flow of your group and model excitement for what you are doing. It will help others get excited, too! Environmental educators or nature center employees may have models of animal feet that can be used to make prints in the mud or snow, a fun extension to this activity.

Additional Resources and Support

- *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv is a book for adults about the need to reconnect children and nature.
- www.ipaworld.org This International Play Association website has information on promoting, protecting, and preserving children's right to play.



TEXTURE ADVENTURE

Explore nature with your sense of touch.

TOUCH A...

TREE



SOIL



ROCK



FLOWER
PETAL



How do each of these textures **FEEL**? Do they feel the same? Have you felt these textures before?



NEXT, try finding texture patterns. For example, compare textures of three different tree barks. Do all trees with needles have rough bark?

TEXTURE ADVENTURE

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Location Ideas

This activity is simple to do in many locations. It lends itself to teaching people that nature is everywhere, even in obvious places like backyards and neighborhoods. Also, many cities have arboretums that are open to the public. This activity works well in sites like this and serves the dual purpose of introducing people to places they may not have taken their children to before.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #6 **Texture Adventure**
- If you have viewfinders or magnifying glasses available you may want to use them with this activity.
- Rubbings with crayons and paper are good extensions to this activity.

Links to Good Books

The Sense of Wonder by Rachel Carson is a beautiful book that can inspire people to go outdoors.

Some good books are:

- *Is it Rough? Is it Smooth? Is it Shiny?* by Tana Hoban
- *Look Inside a Tree* by Gina Ingoglia
- *Everybody Needs a Rock* by Byrd Baylor
- *Be a Friend to Trees* by Patricia Lauber

Adaptations

An extension of this activity is to make rubbings of tree bark and other things found outdoors. Children could make their own rubbings book and label with descriptive words. Children could also make a “map” of an area by using rubbings as landmarks to certain areas.

The more we notice detail the better we will be able to begin to find patterns and make sense of the world. After feeling the bark of many trees a child may notice, for example, that trees with pine needles often have rough, sticky bark. Using lots of descriptive words and rich language exposes children to new vocabulary in an authentic way. Take advantage of all the opportunities this activity offers!

Help children use lots of interesting words to describe textures they are feeling. In-depth nature experiences like these help children broaden their understanding of and deepen their connection with the world around them.

Additional Resources and Support

- *The Sense of Wonder* by Rachel Carson.
- www.naeyc.org This website of the National Association for the Education of Young Children has many nature-related resources for educators. Search keyword “nature”.

“I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in tune once more.”

–John Burroughs



WHAT CAN YOU SEE IN A CLOUD?

Learning to calm ourselves is important for all of us.



Try lying down on a towel or blanket and looking up. What do you see? You might try looking quietly or you might want to use words to describe what you see.

Can you find cloud shapes that remind you of something, like an animal?

Notice the air around you and the ground below you. Take some big, deep breaths. How does it make you feel to lie down on the earth and look at clouds?

Does anything you see surprise you?

WHAT CAN YOU SEE IN A CLOUD?

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Location Ideas

Any open area works well for cloud watching. Having a quiet, peaceful place is helpful. A comfortable, dry surface like grass, flagstone or boulders works well. It is important that families have enough room to spread out.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #7 **What Can You See In A Cloud?**
- You may want to ask families to bring towels or blankets to lie on so they are more comfortable.

Links to Good Books

David Elkind's *The Hurried Child* is a book that points out the need for parents and educators to allow children time to play and develop at their own pace.

Some good books are:

- *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* by Charles Green Shaw
- *Little Cloud* by Eric Carle
- *What Do You See in a Cloud?* by Allan Fowler
- *Quiet Please* by Eva Merriam

Adaptations

An important part of this activity is the pace. Children should not feel as though they are being forced to lie down or keep quiet but rather that it is part of playing a fun game. Deep breathing and snuggling with a nearby loved one can help children slow themselves down. For many adults, cloud watching brings back fond childhood memories. In today's fast-paced lifestyle this activity is a great way to rejuvenate.

Additional Resources and Support

- *The Great Outdoors: Restoring Children's Right to Play Outside* by Mary Rivkin
- www.plt.org This website has resources that encourage children to enjoy hands-on experiences with trees and nature.

"As children we need time to wander, to be outside, to nibble icicles and watch ants, to build with dirt and sticks in a hollow of the earth, to lie back and contemplate clouds and chickadees.

These simple acts forge the connections that define a land of one's own-home and refuge for boys and girls...They form the secure foundation to which we return again and again in our struggle to be strong and strongly connected, to be complete."

—Stephen Trimble



WHAT IS BEAUTIFUL TO YOU?

Take a walk and enjoy everything around you.

Pay close attention...



LOOK...

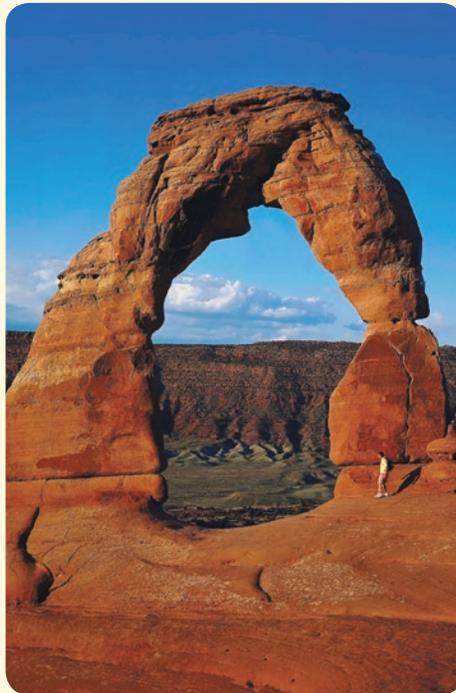


LISTEN...



FEEL...

Look closely for details in nature that you find beautiful and describe why they appeal to you.



For many people, noticing beautiful things makes them feel thankful for our incredible Earth!

WHAT IS BEAUTIFUL TO YOU?

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

Beauty can be found anywhere and in any weather. Arboretums, parks and prairies are all good choices for this activity, if you are working with several families. Sometimes we just need to remember to appreciate all the beauty that surrounds us and begin to think of things around us as simple gifts.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #8 **What Is Beautiful to You?**

Links to Good Books

Andy Goldsworthy is an installation artist who works with natural materials. He has produced several gorgeous books and videos that can be used to inspire others to see the beauty in nature and to begin creating nature art.

Some good books are:

- *Beautiful Blackbird* by Ashley Bryan
- *The Quiet Way Home* by Bonny Becker
- *The Wonder Thing* by Libby Hathorn

Adaptations

This is a wonderful activity because there are no physical limitations for anyone. People can even sit in one place and look around from that perspective to find beautiful things. Children with social challenges or those that are hurting from some emotional trauma in their lives, can benefit from this type of experience. Learning to be mindful and appreciative of nature can help children who have exhibited aggression begin to reinvent themselves as caretakers.

Additional Resources and Support

- www.rootsandshoots.org This website has resources for educators to help children see themselves as caretakers of the land.
- www.naaee.org This website has information about connecting children with nature.

“Art to me, is the interpretation of the impression which nature makes upon the eye and brain.”

–Childe Hassam



COLORS IN THE WORLD

Let's see how many colorful nature items you can find outdoors. Take a walk and look closely.

Can you match a color you see in nature with a color on you?



What color are you seeing the most on your walk? What things are matching colors?



COLORS IN THE WORLD

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Location Ideas

Remember that nature is everywhere so get outside and enjoy! If your goal is to introduce families to places in the community that they may not be visiting, botanical gardens and parks with a variety of plant species are location ideas for this type of activity. Planning activities in areas where traffic is at a distance is helpful to families with young children because it makes supervision easier.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet # 9 **Colors in the World**. Many activity sheets may be copied in black and white but this one should be copied in color.
- An extension of this activity is to provide clipboards and paper for participants to rub the plants they are observing onto a white piece of paper. Plants will leave some of their color and scent. Give each child a box of crayons and encourage them to draw the colors of the earth. Enjoy drawing outdoors!
- Another extension activity could be to give children "color" necklaces to wear as they walk. Many different colors may be used or different values of one color. Necklaces can be made by punching holes in paint color samples and stringing them onto a piece of yarn.

“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home, that wilderness is a necessity.”

–John Muir

Links to Good Books

Some good books are:

- ***All The Colors of the Earth*** by Sheila Hamanaka
- ***My Crayons Talk*** by Patricia Hubbard
- ***Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*** by Bill Martin, Jr.
- ***The Earth is Painted Green: A Garden of Poems About Our Planet*** by Barbara Brenner
- ***In the Tall, Tall Grass*** by Denise Fleming

Adaptations

For young children, you may want to encourage them to make marks on paper with colors that they are seeing. Children who do not yet have the language skills to tell you what they are seeing can show you with their crayons. Having a crayon to hold up to natural items simplifies the activity and helps them focus.

Additional Resources and Support

- ***The Wonders of Nature: Honoring Children's Ways of Knowing*** by Ruth Wilson



THE WONDER OF TREES

Take a walk and explore trees. Compare the size, color, texture and parts of the trees around you. How many of these things you can find?



the **TALLEST** tree



the **shortest** tree



the most **COLORFUL** tree



the **WIDEST** tree



Use your arms to measure the widest part of the tree.

the one with the most **TWISTED** roots



Use whole body **MOVEMENT** to fully experience and represent your discoveries. For example, stretch as tall as the trunk, twist like the roots, and sway in the breeze. Body movements such as these help us learn while adding these experiences to our muscle memory!

What's your favorite part?

Maybe it's the weird **BRANCHES**



or maybe
your tree has
interesting
PODS or
FLOWERS.



Explore the **PARTS** close up...

like
LEAVES



or **BARK.**



Maybe
that will
be **YOUR**
FAVORITE
PART.



Use **MOVEMENT** to represent the whole tree and its parts. Pay close attention with all your senses to find details and patterns in nature.

NOW

Sketch  or take a photo  of
a special tree or **YOUR FAVORITE PART.**

THE WONDER OF TREES

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Location Ideas

Try to choose a location with a wide variety of evergreen and deciduous trees. Even a neighborhood with some diversity of trees will work. The key to this activity is slowing down, observing closely, and using purposeful movement to strengthen learning.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity #10 **The Wonder of Trees**
- Paper, clipboards and pencils for sketching
- Cameras (optional)
- Measuring tape (optional)

Links to Good Books

Some good books are:

- *I Love Our Earth* by Bill Martin Jr. and Michael Sampson
- *Sometimes I Dance Mountains* by Byrd Baylor

*“This very moment
is a seed from
which the flowers
of tomorrow’s
happiness grow.”*

–Margaret Lindsey

Adaptations

Modern brain research indicates that movement accelerates learning and supports memory. Incorporating whole body movement (stretching tall like the trees, wrapping arms around a trunk, and mimicking swaying in the wind) is a great way to learn and remember. Adults may feel inhibited in a group so encourage them to take their child’s perspective and have fun.

Finding and comparing patterns requires high level thinking for young children. Break down the process into steps. First, closely observe and note as many details about a tree as possible. Next, compare those details to the observations seen, felt, smelled and heard in the next tree to find patterns. Keep in mind that all observations have to be stored and then recalled when new information is detected in order to compare. Marvel at the brain processing involved and your children’s abilities!

Additional Resources and Support

- www.arboday.org Arbor Day Foundation has information on tree identification and planting which families may find helpful.
- www.childrenandnature.org Children & Nature Network provides information on the benefits of spending time outdoors.



SHAPES IN NATURE

Star shapes are everywhere in nature. If you look closely you'll be surprised at how many star shapes you'll find.



Can you find a star shape...in parts of **TREES?**



...in a **FLOWER?**



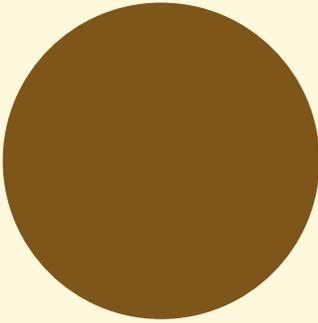
...in other **PLANTS?**



Now...try making your body in the shape of a **5**-pointed star like this! →



Can you find circle shapes?



Can you find letters?



What other **SHAPES** can you find?

You might try building your shape with a pipe cleaner or clay.

NOW

Sketch  or take photos  of some of the **SHAPES** you have found.

SHAPES IN NATURE

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

This is an ideal activity to do on a neighborhood walk. It reinforces understanding that nature is everywhere, even in the crack in your sidewalk. You don't have to travel to state parks to get the benefits of playing in nature.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity #11 **Shapes In Nature**
- Paper, clipboards and pencils for sketching
- Paper or wooden shapes and letters
- Chenille stems (pipe cleaners) for bending into shapes you see
- Clay (optional)
- Cameras (optional)

Links to Good Books

Some good books are:

- *I Spy Shapes in Art* by Lucy Micklethwait
- *Discovering Nature's Alphabet* by Krytina Castella and Brian Boyl
- *A Tall Grass Prairie Alphabet* by Claudia McGhee
- *The Wildlife ABC* by Jan Thornhill
- *A Gardener's Alphabet* by Mary Azarian
- *The Shape of Things* by Dayle Ann Dodds

Adaptations

Be playful and follow your child's lead. This is an excellent opportunity to remind adults that these are not naturalist-led, but children-led activities! Encourage parents to think about what their child knows (i.e. shapes or letters from their name). For older children make a game out of challenging each other to think about where you have seen these shapes before in the built environment as well as in nature. Another idea is to use chenille stems as part of a game by bending them into shapes you see and then looking to find that shape again. Young children can show you what they are seeing by doing this even before they have the vocabulary to tell you.

Additional Resources and Support

- www.imaginazium.com This website provides yoga cards for children to encourage body awareness.

“There are two lasting gifts you can give your child...one is roots, the other is wings.”

–Anonymous



ANIMAL CLUES

There are all kinds of animals, each leaving behind their own special prints or tracks. If you observe these prints carefully, you might be able to learn more about the animal that made them.



Look closely for clues the animal tracks might provide.

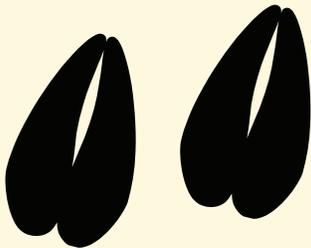
- A clue to the **size** of the animal...
- A clue to the **shape** of the animal's foot...
- A clue about the **number** of toes the animal has...



(Hint: If the tracks are fork-shaped, it's probably a bird!)



(Hint: If the tracks are paw-shaped, it's probably a mammal!)



Can you make tracks of your own? Your own feet are leaving clues about you!





Go on a walk outside. Can you find any tracks that match the ones in the guide? They can be found in snow, mud, and dirt. Look closely under trees or near water!

ANIMAL TRACK GUIDE

Tracks are not to scale but are generally shown from small to large (left to right).

mouse 	turtle 	squirrel 	crow
skunk 	cat 	opossum 	raccoon
rabbit 	dog 	turkey 	duck
deer 	horse 	human 	bear

All images from microsoft clip gallery.



Try **MOVING** like the animal whose tracks you found. Do you scurry, hop or leap?

NOW

Sketch  or take a photo  of the most **INTERESTING TRACKS** you find.

ANIMAL CLUES

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

The wilder and more natural the location you can find for this activity, the more animal tracks you will find. Consider looking near water or food and habitat sources. In winter this activity works extremely well in freshly fallen snow!

Supplies

- Adventure Activity #12 **Animal Clues**
- Paper, clipboards and pencils for sketching
- Animal tracks field guide(s)
- Camera (optional)

Links to Good Books

Some good books are:

- *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats
- *Footprints in the Snow* by Mei Matsuoka
- *Stranger in the Woods* by Carl Sams II and Jean Stoick
- *Night Tree* by Eve Bunting

Adaptations

Modeling the learning process and a sense of awe for the natural world is just as important as having information to share. Don't worry about having all the answers. For example, if you don't know the name of an insect, make up a funny name together or plan a trip to the library to look at insect identification guides. Show your respect for all of nature. Help children see themselves as caretakers for their world and all of its creatures. It has been said that teaching a child not to step on a caterpillar is as important to the child as to the caterpillar!

Additional Resources and Support

- www.nwf.org National Wildlife Federation has Green Hour and Nature Find: both aimed at helping families connect to nature locally.
- www.janegoodall.org Jane Goodall Institute has resources on wildlife research, education, and conservation.

“As children begin their forays out into the natural world, we can encourage feelings for the creatures living there. Cultivating relationships with animals, both real and imagined, is one of the best ways to foster empathy during early childhood.”

–David Sobel



HIDDEN PICTURES HUNT

If you look really closely at tree bark and other natural items and use your creativity, sometimes you'll be able to find hidden pictures. Let's go outside and see what there is to find!



If you use your imagination, can you see the two friends walking together?

Do you see an animal in this bark (maybe a unicorn)?



Be creative. Make up and tell each other stories about the hidden pictures you find in nature.

Try using some of the natural items around you to make a sculpture or “picture” of yourself!



Have fun searching for just the right shapes and portraying details like eyebrows or hair!



NOW

Sketch  or take a photo  of **YOUR HIDDEN PICTURE** or nature artwork. You can even write down the story you created.

HIDDEN PICTURES HUNT

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

Choose a location with lots of "loose parts" like rocks, rotting logs, etc. These can provide a rich canvas for you to spot hidden pictures.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #13 **Hidden Pictures Hunt**
- Paper, clipboards and pencils for sketching
- Leaf rubbings are an extension of this activity. If you choose to do rubbings you will need to bring paper and crayons, and plan for a hard surface to work on. These rubbings could be added to a nature journal.

Links to Good Books

Some good books are:

- *Leaf Man* by Lois Ehlert
- *Snowballs* by Lois Ehlert
- *Shapes and Things* by Tana Hoban
- *It Looks Like Spilt Milk* by Charles G. Shaw
- *Smudge* by Lionel Le Neouanic
- *Little Cloud* by Eric Carle
- *Not a Stick* by Antionette Portis

Adaptations

All learners, but especially children, need tactile experiences with materials to learn effectively. Superior eye-hand coordination, self-confidence, and more brain synapse connections develop when we touch and handle objects. For young children, focus just on the rich exploration of a variety of materials. With older children, weave in discussions of material attributes.

Additional Resources and Support

- www.nifplay.org Find research by Dr. Stuart Brown on the crucial role of play in children's lives at the National Institute for Play.

"Natural textures and surfaces, like weathered rock and rough wood, are filled with the images we project into them, for they actually are living chronicles of experience. They speak of the natural processes of growth, metamorphosis, and disintegration of the forests and mountains of the past."

–Leonardo da Vinci



AMAZING SEEDS

Seeds are everywhere and there is a whole new world inside of them. If you nurture seeds, they will show you their magic!

Let's go on a seed hunt. Collect the seeds you find.



Look on the **GROUND**...



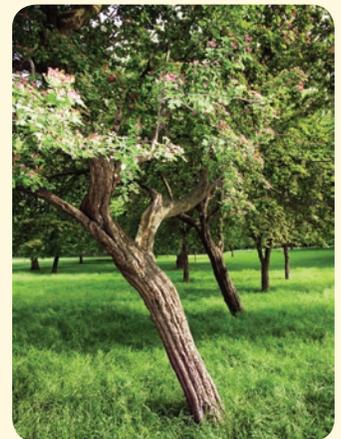
or out in a **FIELD**.



Find **FLOWERS**...



or a **TREE** in your neighborhood!



Look closely at the seeds you have collected and see how many things you can do with them. Try sorting, counting, even making patterns. Try remembering what the plant looked like that each seed came from!



LET'S MOVE! Try putting heavy socks on over your shoes while you walk through tall grass or a natural area. You may be surprised to see the seeds you collect on your feet!



LOOK closely at the seeds.

Plant the seeds you found in a cup filled with soil. →

Put it on a windowsill with lots of sunlight. Watch the seeds sprout and the plants get taller and stronger as you feed them with water and sunlight.



NOW

Sketch  or take photos  of your **SEEDS GROWTH** and change.

AMAZING SEEDS

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

A tall grass prairie is an excellent place to hike and find seeds. If you have access to a natural place, be sure to have permission to collect seeds. If not, try purchasing seeds for a gardening activity in your schoolyard or backyard.

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #14 **Amazing Seeds**
- Paper, clipboards and pencils for sketching
- Old, heavy socks to wear over shoes for seed collections
- Masking tape for seed bracelets
- Baggies, or photo album pocket sheets for collecting seeds
- Containers, soil for planting seeds, and spray bottles for watering

Links to Good Books

Some good books are:

- *The Way to Start a Day* by Byrd Baylor
- *Giving Thanks* by Jonathan London
- *In the Tall, Tall Grass* by Denise Fleming

Adaptations

There are many ways to collect seeds. Shake seeds out of pine cones. Crack open nuts. Hunt under trees. Picking up seed pods and opening them is fun! While walking, you could wear heavy socks over shoes or a bracelet of masking tape with the sticky side out so seeds will stay with you. Encourage parents to watch young children carefully because of possible toxicity or choking. Help children plant the seeds. Did you know working with soil releases endorphins just like exercise? So go ahead, get your hands dirty and then watch what happens as your seeds sprout and grow!

Additional Resources and Support

- www.dimensionsfoundation.org Dimensions Educational Research Foundation provides information and research on the benefits of gardening with children.
- www.ahs.org The American Horticulture Society has a database on children's gardens and an annual Children and Youth Garden Symposium.

"If education and other forces, intentionally or unintentionally, continue to push the young away from direct experiences in nature, the cost to science itself will be high. Most scientists today began their careers as children, chasing bugs and snakes, collecting spiders, and feeling awe in the presence of nature. Since such untidy activities are fast disappearing, how then, will our future scientists learn about nature?"

–Dr. Paul Dayton



ANIMAL HOMES

Dens, nests, burrows...these are all homes that animals build to protect themselves from weather or predators.

Where do animals live?

Under the **GROUND...**



In the **GRASS...**



In **TREES...**



In **STREAMS OR PONDS...**



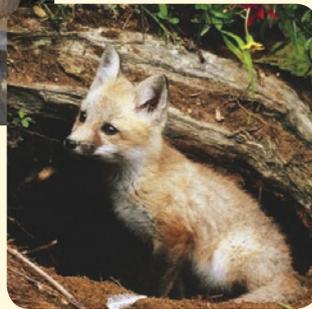
Look closely for animal homes and what materials they used to build them. Think about **how** they built their homes!

Pretend that you are an animal and try building a home or fort of your own!

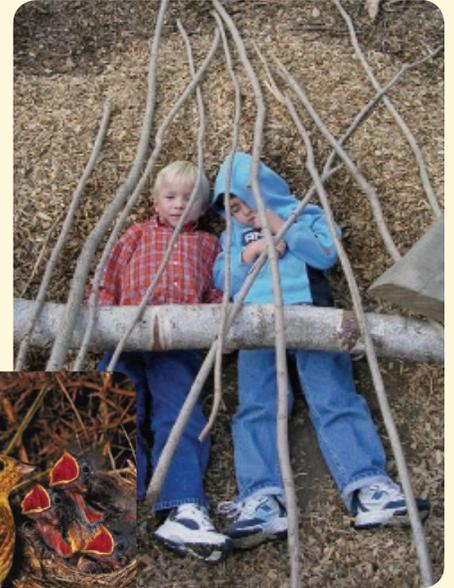
THINK like an animal...can your family fit inside?...are food and water nearby?...are you protected?



Maybe you will make a den like a fox or bear. →



Maybe you will make a nest like a bird. →



MOVE like your animal and play house in your new home!

NOW

Sketch  or take photos  of an **ANIMAL HOME** you found or built.

ANIMAL HOMES

These research-based Adventure Activities have been designed to support whole-child development and positive connections with the natural world.

Location Ideas

This can be an activity that works inside and outside depending on your weather and facilities. You might even try this in an outdoor classroom. Seasons change the experience. Spring can be an amazing time to watch birds building their nests. Summer and fall are good times to watch insects at work, like ants building their hills and spiders spinning their webs. Winter is a great time to look for animal tracks leading "home".

Supplies

- Adventure Activity Sheet #15 **Animal Homes**
- Blankets, blocks and large boxes for fort-building
- Paper, clipboards and pencils for sketching
- Binoculars (optional)
- Camera (optional)

Links to Good Books

Some good books are:

- *The Mitten* by Jan Brett
- *Not a Box* by Antoinette Portis
- *Time to Sleep* by Denise Fleming
- *A Quiet Place* by Douglas Woods

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."

–Maya Angelou

Adaptations

These activities can be a good way to bring nature inside. Extend previous searches for animal habitats by building blanket forts inside and watching birds and squirrels from the window. Another extension of this activity could be weaving natural items loosely into burlap and hanging it from a tree in your backyard. Then watch to see birds borrowing your items to help them build their nests!

Additional Resources and Support

- www.allianceforchildhood.org offers support for playworkers and families searching for resources on the benefits of nature play.
- www.projectwild.org Project Wild has educational materials to teach kids how to think, not what to think, about environmental issues.