

Field Activities- A Quick Sampler

Time outdoors in nature is GREAT for children. Unstructured time in which children explore, observe, make up games and activities, etc is the AMONG the BEST ACTIVITIES children can do. It builds problem solving skills, ability to focus, social skills, and an appreciation of nature. Mom and Dad, just take part and follow your child's lead.

In addition to free, child-initiated play, try these fun outdoor activities with one or two children, or a group.

Moving - Do big muscle movement like running, jumping, hopping, etc. It's usually a child's first impulse outdoors anyway. Just be safe.

Roll down the hill; get into the mud or the snow or the tall grass.

Wade through the water.

Observation - Stop, and observe with all senses.

☞ Look, listen, feel, smell, touch.

☞ Close your eyes to heighten the other senses.

☞ Look for things that are wet, or green, or hard, or that crawl.

☞ Use a frame, lens, or other tool to focus attention.

When the children observe, ask them to "Remember what you observe." OR "Write them down or draw them in your explorer notebook."

Path or trail - Mark a path across some natural area with a long piece of string or cord. Put a marker (a looped knot, clothes pin, etc) at interesting places. Children follow along the cord. At each marker, stop and explore with all your senses.

Clouds - Lie on your back and look at clouds. What shapes are in the clouds. What clouds might bring rain or snow?

Still-Hunting - Choose a sitting place, or let one choose you. Be comfortable and stay motionless. Observe

Rubbings - Make rubbings by placing paper over outdoor textures and objects and rub with the long surface of a crayon. Bring these indoors as "specimens." Display them or make collages or other artworks.

Treasure (Scavenger) Hunts - Look for a particular thing (or list of things- leaf, bug, stick, etc) outdoors. OR look for things in nature that are ...

Shapes - Find things shaped round, or square, or long, or find as many different shapes as you can.

Colors - Look for red or orange, or blue, or gray. Are the fall leaves really all red or yellow? Are spring leaves the same green?

Patterns - Rows, swirls, ridges, things that come together, etc.

Opposites - (big/ little, high/ low, wet/ dry, light/ dark, hard/ soft.)

Movements - Things that stay still, sway, fall, rise up, flap, and grow,

Observation Tools

Sometimes a simple thing helps a child focus attention and observe more.

- ⌘ Use Paper or cardboard tube like a telescope or microscope.
- ⌘ A cardboard or paper frame—just cut a square opening in the center - frames an area to look closely at. Or use a loop of string or a short (2 or 3 inch long) piece of 4" diameter plastic pipe.
- ⌘ A longer piece of plastic pipe (12" long) lets you look down into water to see what's under the surface or on the bottom.

Compare what you see in nature with books and field guides.

Maps and Pictures and Logs

Draw a picture of something specific about the area you visited, or make a collage using things brought back, or make a map.

Tell stories about what they saw and experienced. "Oh, this is the pond, isn't it? What did you do there/ see there?"

Make a list or chart of what the children found on their hike.

Earth Windows - Lie down; lie still. Think of yourself as part of the earth. Cover yourself with leaves etc.

Tree Silhouettes - Each child shapes his her body to look like a particular species of tree. Others try to guess which one.

Sounds - Lying on the ground with eyes closed and fists raised, lift a finger when you hear a new bird song.

Plant Succession Crawl - Crawl slowly toward a pond; observe the different soil, moisture, other conditions, and plants in each ring around the pond.

Field Activities

Path or trail

Mark with string or cord.

Follow along the cord. When you reach a marker, stop and explore.

Can do this blindfolded.

Motor activity over ground

Center as a starting point. Children make a circle facing in to hear directions. Now turn around (180 degrees, math!) to face out. Move out in a straight line (and later, move back) according to directions:

- Go x steps (counting) and stop. Name pace. Walk slowly. Walk fast. Take bounds (long leaping steps; this tends to satisfy the need to race wildly without letting them race wildly). Others?
- Walk or move like an X animal (biology). Coming back we'll stop half way and each can name his/her animal.
- Take four (six, ten) steps and stop. Notice the circle is bigger. If you go out straight it will be a circle still. (geometry)
- Now go up the alphabet taking one step saying each letter, stop when you reach the letter of your first name. Turn around and face the post to come back. Now go up (or down) the alphabet, stop when you reach the first letter of your last name. All stop. Look around.
- Take x steps, looking for things on the ground that begin with the letter X. Remember them.
- Things that begin with the letter on your card/ bandanna. Remember them. OR write them down in your explorer notebook.
- Look in your mini-nature-preserve for things that are wet, or green, or that crawl. At every step stop and look down.

Move or stay (with adult OK of course)

Roll down the hill.

Get into the mud

Wade through the water.

Circle the group for connection.

Spokes of a wheel. Make circle arms length apart, face (you say out or in), all lie down heads in if you want to talk with them and have them share with one another.

Heads out if you want them less likely to talk with one another.

Lie on belly (look down at what you find)

Lie on back? Look up at the sky.

Animal relay.

Watch animals outdoors.

Do a relay with children moving the way each animal gets from place to place.

Can be general. Everyone knows that a bunny hops, squirrel scampers, snake slithers, slug slides, insect crawls, bird flies.

Or be more specific and learn more. First watch the actual animals move and study that a little.

Then move as they do. This is more specific. Look at birds for instance. Some birds fly in dips swoops, some hover, some soar high in circles, then dive. Some move in a formation.

Clouds

Lie on your back and look at clouds. Arrange children around some marker so their heads are closer (but not too close) so they can talk. Ask them to point out shapes that they see in the clouds. Ask what clouds might bring rain or snow.

Maps and Pictures

Once indoors, think of draw a picture of something, the area you visited, etc. Then make a collage, a map. Use these things as a trigger to discuss some of the things the children saw and experienced. "Oh, this is the pond, isn't it? What did you do there/ see there?"

Rubbings

Have the students make rubbings by placing paper over outdoor textures and objects and rub with the long surface of a crayon. Bring these indoors as "specimens." Use them if you wish to display or to make collages or other artworks.

Treasure (Scavenger) Hunts

Children can look for a particular thing or list of particular things from outdoors. In addition, there are many things to look for that are represented by the particular natural items, for instance.

Shapes

Colors

Opposites (big/ little, high/ low, wet/ dry, light/ dark, hard/ soft.)

Movements Things that stay still, sway, fall, rise up, flap, and grow,

Have children look for natural objects that represent the "target" they are looking for (shape, color, etc.). You can give them a card with their "target" drawn or written on it.

- Have children explore in pairs or groups looking for these, then come back together OR
- Have children sit in a circle, each child facing out and looking.

Once they see an item for their "target" they raise their hand. To share, have all the children for a particular shape name what they saw, or point it out to the others.

Collecting / Bring back something. (something small) in the film canister, zip lock bag.

To report out about this, process the experience.

You may: share it now by showing and talking.

OR (maybe better for a larger group): Show your object now silently, we will discuss/ share verbally later.

Or: Display it on your desk/ or your spot on the bulletin board, share verbally later.

Just experiencing these things in the natural setting is fine. You can photograph objects and items, or draw them in the natural setting. The objects can be left in or returned to their original spot. Or they can be scattered appropriately, and left outdoors.

OR you may wish to bring items/ specimens back, (as appropriate). This offers an opportunity to do other things later. These may also help connect your nature experiences with the curriculum. For instance, back indoors, if you wish you can work with (make a record of) what the children found on their treasure hunts:

Work with the Collected Natural Materials

Simplest:

- Put the objects into a plastic tote or other container (as appropriate; some things should stay outside). Children can see “their” item from time to time, can watch as it changes (dries out, molds, rots, etc.)
- Make a large poster of them. Glue down the objects; add children's own words about their object. Have children add their objects one by one to the poster, probably starting with larger objects, adding smaller ones. Make it artistic, or make it scientific, whatever you prefer.
- OR if you prefer, each child can do a square and those can be assembled like a patchwork into a poster. Use different colored paper for background and the end product will be even more pleasing. Poster has the advantage that it can be displayed for all to see.
- OR as a variation do a patchwork pattern bulletin board with the pieces separate (easier for each child to take home his/her part later).
- Make a book of it. Glue down the objects and add words. If each child does his/her own page individually the pages can be assembled into a book later in a ring binder. .
- Make a large scavenger score card poster showing how many different things were brought back; see if every square can be filled. The items could be presented and the scorecard filled in large group, or if that isn't practical, each child can do individually with a helper and the large group can see the results later.
- Make a large poster showing how many of each thing was brought back. Graph it. (sorting, categorizing, counting, graphing) This could be done in large group, or each child can bring their item to the poster individually with a helper; the large group can see the results later.
- Make bingo cards with natural items (or pictures of natural items) glued on them.
- Make “matching” cards with natural items on one, a drawn shape or word on another. Play matching games (memory game, post them in two columns and link each item with its word with a string, etc.)
- Play bingo or other game using natural items as tokens.

Obstacle courses (generally)

Find challenging routes in the outdoor setting. Mark them in some way. Make a non-challenging course a challenge by adding a difficulty factor (carry a full glass of water, lead a blindfolded partner, do it backwards; move silently, move in slow motion) Make it NOT a race, rather a test of skill.

Cornelius October 24, 2006

Outdoor Activities

(Remember safety in all activities. Adults watch over children.)

Earth Windows

Lie down; lie still. Think of yourself as part of the earth. Cover yourself with leaves etc.

Blind Walk

In pairs, blindfolded, one led by other. Show, help explore. Other senses than sight this time, perhaps heightened.

Meet a Tree.

Pairs. One child is blindfolded, led by partner to tree, explores with hands, smell, sounds. Child is then led away, blindfold removed, and child tries to find the same tree again.

Blind Trail

Lay out a long trail with string, child is blindfolded, follows it with one hand on the string.

Role-Playing

Be a _____ (certain animal, plant is ok too).

Sounds

Lying on the ground with eyes closed and fists raised, lift a finger when you hear a new bird song.

Colors

How many colors (or shades of colors) can you see without moving or turning? (Can have them look through a paper tube or box.

Caterpillar Walk

Lead children, all blindfolded and linked hands on shoulders of the child in front of them, to a spot. Undo blindfolds and find their way back.

OR have the children explore the destination spot while blindfolded, then lead the children back blindfolded and ask them to find the secret spot.

Duplication

Show children examples of several natural objects that they can find outside. Show them for only 25 seconds under a handkerchief then hide the examples. Children then spread out and bring back examples of those objects.

Micro-hike

Use a piece of string three to five feet long. Lay it across the natural surface. Follow the string. Keep your eyes no higher than one foot above the ground. See what you can see.

Pyramid of Life

Children write on a slip of paper an animal or plant they would like to be. Pick them up, explain a food pyramid starting with energy from the sun, to plants, to prey species, to predators. Build a pyramid starting with plants on the bottom. Not possible? Have some children change from predator to a more modest animal or a plant.

Recipe for a Forest

Give each child a 'Deed' to an imaginary square mile of land, and each student draws a map of an ideal dream-forest.

Webbing.

Create a web using a ball of string or yarn. Pass the yarn to each member and describe their connection in nature (food to the eater, prey to predator, etc.) To demonstrate how each member of the natural community is important to the whole, tug on the string for a chosen member who might be 'eliminated,' and feel how many others feel it.

Plant Succession Crawl.

Children crawl slowly toward a pond, in order to become aware of the different soil, moisture, and other conditions and the plants in each ring around the pond.

Tree Silhouettes

Each child shapes his/her body to look like a particular species of tree. Others try to guess which one. Can do in groups to shape a representative, or to all be a grove of their species.

Scavenger Hunt

We've all done these. Go in groups; it's more fun.

Sleeping Miser

This is a game to play. Choose Miser and Stalkers. Miser waits, lying in a natural setting, blindfolded, protecting a target object. Stalkers must creep up silently and steal it. If the miser hears a stalker and points at him/her, that stalker must freeze. If someone steals the object, he/she becomes the new miser.

Still-Hunting

Choose a sitting place, or let one choose you. Be comfortable and stay motionless. Observe

Selections adapted from Joseph Cornell. 1979. Sharing Nature With Children. Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications.

These are very brief snippets of Cornell's activities. Read his book for longer descriptions and lots more!

Outdoor Activities

(Remember safety in all activities. Adults watch over children.)

Earth Windows

Lie down; lie still. Think of yourself as part of the earth. Cover yourself with leaves etc.

Blind Walk

In pairs, blindfolded, one led by other. Show, help explore. Other senses than sight this time, perhaps heightened.

Meet a Tree.

Pairs. One child is blindfolded, led by partner to tree, explores with hands, smell, sounds. Child is then led away, blindfold removed, and child tries to find the same tree again.

Blind Trail

Lay out a long trail with string, child is blindfolded, follows it with one hand on the string.

Role-Playing

Be a _____ (certain animal, plant is ok too).

Sounds

Lying on the ground with eyes closed and fists raised, lift a finger when you hear a new bird song.

Colors

How many colors (or shades of colors) can you see without moving or turning? (Can have them look through a paper tube or box.

Caterpillar Walk

Lead children, all blindfolded and linked hands on shoulders of the child in front of them, to a spot. Undo blindfolds and find their way back.

OR have the children explore the destination spot while blindfolded, then lead the children back blindfolded and ask them to find the secret spot.

Duplication

Show children examples of several natural objects that they can find outside. Show them for only 25 seconds under a handkerchief then hide the examples. Children then spread out and bring back examples of those objects.

Micro-hike

Use a piece of string three to five feet long. Lay it across the natural surface. Follow the string. Keep your eyes no higher than one foot above the ground. See what you can see.

Pyramid of Life

Children write on a slip of paper an animal or plant they would like to be. Pick them up, explain a food pyramid starting with energy from the sun, to plants, to prey species, to predators. Build a pyramid starting with plants on the bottom. Not possible? Have some children change from predator to a more modest animal or a plant.

Recipe for a Forest

Give each child a 'Deed' to an imaginary square mile of land, and each student draws a map of an ideal dream-forest.

Webbing.

Create a web using a ball of string or yarn. Pass the yarn to each member and describe their connection in nature (food to the eater, prey to predator, etc.) To demonstrate how each member of the natural community is important to the whole, tug on the string for a chosen member who might be 'eliminated,' and feel how many others feel it.

Plant Succession Crawl.

Children crawl slowly toward a pond, in order to become aware of the different soil, moisture, and other conditions and the plants in each ring around the pond.

Tree Silhouettes

Each child shapes his or her body to look like a particular species of tree. Others try to guess which one. Can do in groups to shape a representative, or to all be a grove of their species.

Scavenger Hunt

We've all done these. Go in groups; it's more fun.

Sleeping Miser

This is a game to play. Choose Miser and Stalkers. Miser waits, lying in a natural setting, blindfolded, protecting a target object. Stalkers must creep up silently and steal it. If the miser hears a stalker and points at him/her, that stalker must freeze. If someone steals the object, he/she becomes the new miser.

Still-Hunting

Choose a sitting place, or let one choose you. Be comfortable and stay motionless. Observe

Selections adapted from Joseph Cornell. 1979. Sharing Nature With Children. Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications.

These are very brief snippets of Cornell's activities. Read his book for longer descriptions and lots more!

Sobel, D. (1993). Children's Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood. Tuscon, AZ: Zephyr.

Sobel, David. Children's Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood. Wayne State Press, Detroit (www.wsupress.wayne.edu or 1 800 978-7323).

Sobel, David. 1996. Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Environmental Education. Orion Society: ISBN: 0913098507.

Stokes, D. 1976. A Guide to Nature in Winter. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

Sturm, R. (2005). "Childhood Obesity: What We Can Learn from Existing Data on societal Trends, Part 1." Preventing Chronic Disease [serial online] 2(1): 1-9. Accessed at http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2005/jan/04_0038.htm.

Thigpen, Betsy. "Babies Outside: Natural learning environments for infants and toddlers." Western Kentucky University. Conference topic.

Wells, N.M. (2000). "At Home with Nature: The Effects of Nearby Nature on Children's Cognitive Functioning." Environment and Behavior 32(6): 775-795.

Wells, N.M. And G.W. Evans (2003). "Nearby Nature: A Buffer of Life Stress among Rural Children." Environment and Behavior 35(d): 311-330.

Wells, Nancy M., and K.S. Lekies (2006) "Nature and the Life Course: Pathways From Childhood Natural Experiences to Adult Environmentalism." Children, Youth, and Environments 16(1): 1-24. Retrieved October 15, 2006 from <http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/>.

Children and Nature, Websites Following sites have content regarding toddler and preschool children. Many other sites have information for elementary and older children.

Orion Magazine article "Leave No Child Inside" by Richard Louv. March/April 2007
<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/240>

Hooked on Nature from Children and Nature.
<http://www.hookedonnature.org/childrennature/>

Children and Nature Network.
<http://www.cnaturenet.org/>

Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education. MAEOE
www.michiganenvironmentaled.org

Project Learning Tree
<http://www.michiganplt.org/>

Bibliography Children and Nature

- Chawla, L. (1988). "Children's Concern for the Natural Environment." Children's Environment Quarterly 5: 13-20.
- Chawla, L. (1990). "Significant Life Experiences Revisited: A Review of Research on Sources of Environmental Sensitivity." The Journal of Environmental Education 29(3): 11-21.
- Chipeniuk, R. (1995). "Childhood Foraging as a Means of Acquiring Competent Human Cognition about Biodiversity." Environment and Behavior 27(4): 490-512.
- Cornell, J. 1979. Sharing Nature With Children. Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications.
- Ewert, A., G. Place and J. Sibthop (2005). "Early -Life Outdoor Experiences and an Individual's Environmental Attitudes." Leisure Sciences 27: 225-239.
- Faber Taylor, A.F., F.E. Kuo and W.C. Sullivan (2002). "Coping with ADD: The Surprising Connection to Green Play Settings". Environment and Behavior 33(1): 54-77
- Faber Taylor, A.F., F.E. Kuo and W.C. Sullivan (2002). "Views of Nature and Self-Discipline: Evidence from Inner-City Children." Journal of Environmental Psychology 22: 49-63 .
- Hofferth, S. and J. Sandberg (2001). "Changes in American Children's Time, 1981-1997." In Hofferth, S.L. And T.J. Owens, eds. Children at the Millennium: Where Have We Come From, Where Are We Going? Oxford, England: Elsevier Science. .
- Korpela, K. (2002). "Children's Environments." In Bechtel, R.B. And A Churchamen, eds. Handbook of Environmental Psychology. New York: John Willey, 363-373.
- Kuo, F.E and A Faber Taylor (2004). "A Potential Natural Treatment for Attention -Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder: Evidence from a national Study." American Journal of Public Health 94(9): 1580-1586.
- Leupker, R.V. (1999). "How Physically Active Are American Children and What Can We Do About It?" International Journal of Obesity 23(2): S12-S17.
- Louv, R. 2005. Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit.
- Mander, Jerry. Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television. 1977.
- Milord, Susan. The Kids' Nature Book: 365 Indoor/ Outdoor Activities and Experiences. Williamson Kids Can Books. ISBN 1885593074. Found at Powells.com.
- Moore, R.C. (1986). Childhood's Domain. London: Croom Helm
- Sebba, R. (1995). "From Barnyards to Backyards: An Exploration through Adult Memories and Children's Narratives in Search of an Ideal Playscape." Children's Environments 12(3): 362-380
- Snyder, G. 1990. The Practice of the Wild. Washington, DC: Shoemaker- Hoard