

Field Activities- A Quick Sampler

Time outdoors in nature is GREAT for children. Outdoor time to explore, observe, and play 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.

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 certain-
Shapes, Colors, Patterns, Opposites, Movements

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.

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.

Collecting

Just experiencing things in the natural setting is fine. Bring back memories and impressions. But collecting things is fun too.

- Photograph or draw objects and items in the natural setting.
- Bring back (something small) in a small container- cup, zip lock bag, etc. The container helps keep the size and number of items manageable.
- "Catch and release" for any living items.

Adult helps choose what can be brought indoors.

Displays and "Museums":

Bring items/ specimens back to display or to do other things later

- Press and dry appropriate natural items (leaves, flowers, etc.)
- Put the objects into a plastic tote or other container(s) (as appropriate; some things really should stay outside). Children can see "their" item from time to time, can even watch as it changes (dries out, molds, rots, etc.)
- Make a simple terrarium in a glass or clear plastic jar. Put in sand for drainage, then a chunk of earth with moss or other small plants, and mist it with water. Put the lid on loosely. Watch it over time.

Projects:

- Do a collage or poster or sculpture with the natural item(s).
- Make a large poster of the items. Glue down the objects; add children's own words. Make it artistic, scientific, as you prefer.
- Make a book adding the objects and add words. For a group, if each child does his/her own page individually the pages can be assembled into a book later in a ring binder.

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