

# Explore Your Environment

Respect Rule: Look, Listen, Learn, and Leave Alone (until instructed).

## Overview

This activity will introduce students to the natural environment near their school such as a local creek.

## Background

This lesson is designed as an introductory trip in a series of walking field trips. If it is more convenient, combine elements of each lesson into a longer, one-day field trip.

In the local watersheds, there are several creeks within walking distance of elementary schools. These locations also have large grassy areas where children can lie or sit on the ground for drawing, pantomiming, and listening. School sites may have natural areas next to their playgrounds, and portions of these activities could be conducted on a school site where children have sensory access to natural vegetation and wildlife (for example, singing birds).

The suggested activities follow the Flow Learning™ system developed by Joseph Cornell in *Sharing Nature with Children*. Plan at least one hour for all activities. Many of the parks have play structures, and the teacher will decide whether time on the play structures is part of the field trip.

## Before-the-Field-Trip Activities

**Activity 1:** Animal Parts Game

**Time:** 5–10 minutes

**Materials:** None

1. Ask children to pantomime an insect with a friend or two, remembering that insects have six legs, three body segments, and one pair of antennae. Can they add “feelers” or antennae to their insect? Move like an insect? Can they regroup to make a spider? Can they move like a spider? Can they turn their spider into a scorpion with big pincers? Into a snake?

2. With older children, let them choose the animal and pantomime.

## Field Trip Activities

**Activity 1:** Natural and Man-Made Walk

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Materials:** None

1. Review location and decide on a short walking path where children can see natural and man-made objects.
2. Ask children to locate five natural objects and five man-made objects.
3. Ask them to walk without talking but raise their hand when they see an object they want to share with the group. For younger children, focus on sharing properties and naming. Encourage kindergartners to find living and nonliving things. Encourage first graders to find solids, liquids, and gases (if this science standard has been presented already).

**Activity 2:** Guess My Plant

**Time:** 10–20 minutes

**Materials:** Nature Journal and crayons

1. Tell students they are going to draw and/or describe one plant that captured their interest.
2. Have students look at the plant closely so that a friend could pick out their mystery plant from all the other plants around them. The objective is not to stump their friend, but to have their friend find the mystery plant. Tell them not to get discouraged. They may give their friends hints after showing their drawings.
3. Remind children that drawing time is quiet time. At this age, students’ drawings support their intense observations.
4. During sharing time, encourage children to describe and compare the size of their plant.



### Objectives

Students will:

1. draw and write observations of a plant they found near the creek;
2. use their senses to learn more about a local creek and its inhabitants;
3. learn the outdoor rules of Look, Listen, Learn, and Leave Alone (until instructed).

### Grade Levels

K–3

### Adult/Student Ratio

4 to 20

### Where

Forests, grasslands, riparian habitat, woodlands

### Skills

Observing, investigating, recording observations

### Key Words

Solid  
Liquid  
Gas  
Natural  
Man-made

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**If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.**  
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—Rachel Carson  
*Listening to Nature*,  
by Joseph Cornell

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**Activity 3:** Sound Game

**Time:** 10 minutes to listen and share,

**Materials:** Nature Journal and crayons

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1. Bring group back together and sit in a circle.
2. Ask students to use their ears to experience what is around them. If possible, sit close to the creek so they can hear the water. Have them close their eyes and raise a finger each time they hear a natural sound.
3. Stop and share.
4. Have children draw and describe the sound so a friend could identify the sound.

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## After-the-Field-Trip Activity

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**Activity 1:** Tell a Story of a Creek

**Time:** 15 minutes

**Materials:** Choose a Native American story (see Appendix E; also available online at: [www.steonline.org](http://www.steonline.org))

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1. Read several stories and choose one that seems to fit the students' interests, and includes animals that might live at the field trip location. *It is best to tell the stories from memory rather than read them.* It is only necessary to remember the story line and retell the story in one's own words.
2. Remind students that before there were books, families told stories to each other aloud.
3. Depending on the story chosen, preface the story with a discussion of story elements or structure. For example, a *pourquoi* tale explains something in nature, but also includes talking animals and other elements that are not true. Fables end with a moral, a rule that adults want to teach children through the story. The introduction to these story types will lay the foundation for later explanation of *pourquoi* tales, fables, and tall tales in upper elementary grades.
4. Tell the story of the creek or one of its inhabitants.
5. Discuss story elements. What was fiction and what was true? Did the story have a message?

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## Source

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“The Flow Learning System,” *Sharing Nature with Children*, by Joseph Cornell

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## Resources

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### For the teacher:

*Sharing Nature with Children*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. by Joseph Cornell. 1998. DAWN Publications, Nevada City, CA.

*Sharing Nature with Children II*, by Joseph Cornell. 1989. DAWN Publications, Nevada City, CA.