

Getting in Touch with the Natural Environment

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

Overview

In these activities, students will explore and enjoy outdoor and natural environments while developing a set of guidelines for protecting and respecting nature. They will learn observational skills and use their senses to describe their observations.

Background

Outdoor activities, focused on leisure, recreational or education, can have an impact on the environment. Teaching students appropriate ways to treat living things is essential for further outdoor study. People are surrounded daily by many details, colors, sounds, and textures that go unnoticed without careful observation. One can be self-taught to notice details by being a careful observer and being aware of one's surroundings.

Before-the-Field-Trip Activities

Activity 1: Earth Manners

Time: 1 hour

Materials: Copy of the story *Trapper* (included in Project Learning Tree Guidebook, Earth Manners Lesson p.380), chart paper, white board or chalk board, paper, pencils and crayons

1. Read or tell the story *Trapper*.
2. Students respond to the story by brainstorming "earth manners."
3. List their ideas on chart paper.
4. For younger students, model and then have students work together to act out rules that they have developed. Older students may write the rules and illustrate them for an "Earth Manners" class book.

Activity 2: Walk and Talk

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Butcher paper to cover an existing classroom display

1. Before the activity, cover existing classroom display, bulletin board or center area.
2. Point out the area to students as they begin the activity. Ask them to write or draw from memory the things they think are covered.
3. Uncover the area and have them write or draw things they missed on the back of their paper.
4. Discuss what they remembered and why; what they forgot and why. Emphasize that observing carefully is an important skill when learning about the outdoors.
5. Talk about different ways to observe (see, hear, touch, smell and taste).
6. Review the Earth Manners list or class book created previously in Before-the-Field Trip Activity 1.

Field Trip Activities

Activity 1: Mini Hike

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Clipboards, pencils, hand lenses (all optional). Additional adults such as aides or parents may be helpful.

1. In partners, give students five minutes to pick a spot within the playground where they will spend time observing.
2. Explain that they will be observing (looking closely) at their area for 10 minutes. They should look, listen, touch, and smell. They should focus on just the immediate area around them and notice details.
3. When everyone has chosen a spot, give them 10 minutes to observe.
4. Use their fingers to take a "Mini Hike" around their observation area. As they take their "Mini Hike," they should notice things along the way and look closely.



Objectives

Students will:

1. discuss and practice appropriate ways to explore natural environments;
2. learn and practice the "Four L's" (Look, Listen, Learn, and Leave Alone (until instructed));
3. use observational skills, and learn to interpret and describe what they see.

Grade Levels

K-3

Adult/Student Ratio

1 to 20 (classroom);
4 to 20 (outdoors)

Where

Forests, grasslands, riparian habitat, woodlands, school site

Skills

Observing, discussing, illustrating, writing, charting

Key Words

Observe
Man-made
Natural
Respect
Senses
Source

“
Every child should have mud pies, grasshoppers, water bugs, tadpoles, frogs, mud turtles, elderberries, wild strawberries, acorns, chestnuts, trees to climb, brooks to wade in, water lilies, woodchucks, bats, bees, butterflies, various animals to pet, hay fields, pine cones, rocks to roll, sand, snakes, huckleberries, and hornets, and any child who has been deprived of these has been deprived of the best part of his education.
”

—Luther Burbank
A Leader's Guide to Nature-Oriented Activities,
Betty Van Der Smissen
and Oswald H. Goering

5. Gather together and discuss what was observed, seen, heard, and smelled.
6. Back in the classroom, make a list on chart paper or in the student's Nature Journal.

Activity 2: Outdoor Scientists

Time: 1.5 hours

Materials: Clipboards, paper, pencils, hand lenses

1. Before leaving for the site, review Earth Manners and observation skills learned in the Before-the-Field-Trip Activities.
2. Choose an appropriate area at the field trip site, gather the group in a circle and sit quietly with eyes closed.
3. After a few minutes, ask the students what they heard, what direction they think the sound was coming from, what they think made the sound.
4. Discuss both natural and unnatural sounds, for example, human-made such as airplanes, trucks, etc.
5. For younger children, have them act-out something that they heard and have others try to guess. Older children may make notes or illustrations of what they heard.
6. In small groups, have students explore the outdoor site. Explain that they will look and listen for signs of animals, observe the types of plants (be aware of any dangerous plants such as poison oak), study water areas, and talk with their group about the things they see.
7. Encourage students to notice details and record them with words or drawings.

After-the-Field-Trip Activity

Activity: What Did You See, Smell, Feel and Hear?

Time: 1 hour

Materials: Chart paper

1. Before the activity, prepare a chart with four columns on large paper. Label each column with the following words or pictures: See, Hear, Touch, and Smell.
2. In the classroom, have students review their notes/drawings from their field activities (above).
3. Have each student choose a buddy and give 5–10 minutes for partners to talk about their

favorite observations from the activities.

4. Circulate among the group and encourage children to use describing words such as colors, smells, textures etc.
5. As a whole group, look at the prepared chart paper.
6. Begin to fill out the chart with observations of things that were seen, heard, touched, or smelled.
7. As an additional activity, students may create illustrations to accompany the chart.

Source

Adapted with permission from
Project Learning Tree Environmental Education Activity Guide, American Forest Foundation, 1993.
Delta Education for Learning, Teaching, and Action.

Resources

For the teacher:

American Forest Foundation. 1993. *Project Learning Tree—Environmental Education Activity Guide*. Second Edition. Pre K–8 Activities.
San Joaquin County Office of Education. Draft *Delta Education for Learning, Teaching, and Action. Plants and Animals of the Delta*. Developed and published with funds from the CALFED Program.