

Nature Explorations and Journaling

Nature explorations and journaling is a great way to connect with nature for the whole family. The steps of this activity include: go outside for a walk, use your senses to make observations, develop questions and an inquisitive mindset, record what you observe in a nature journal using drawings, words, and numbers, and share what you learn with one another.

Materials you might need



Containers, bags, spoons, or other items to help you with your explorations and observations



Something to write and draw with: Pencils, pens, crayons, colored pencils



Something to write and draw on: a notebook, paper, or a nature journal, you can even make your own nature journal

Questions and activities

Observe insects on flowers

- What do you notice about the insect? The flower? How are they helping each other?
- Listen closely. What sounds are the insects making?
- What do you wonder about the insects and flowers?



Find different kinds of leaves on different kinds of plants

- How are the leaves the same? How are they different?
- What do the leaves feel like? Crunch them, what do they smell like?
- What do you wonder about as you observe the leaves?



Explore logs, rocks, and soil in a wooded area

- Look closely. Look for the tiny organisms as well as the big. What do you notice?
- What plants, animals, fungus, or lichen is living in or on the logs, rocks and soil?
- What do you wonder about as you explore logs, rocks, and soil?



Look and listen for birds

- Sit quietly and listen. How many different bird sounds can you count?
- Where are the birds? On the ground? In the trees? In the sky? What are they doing?
- What do you wonder about as you observe the birds?



Do you ever hear a rustle in the plants as you walk by?

- Who do you think is making the sound? Could it be a frog? A snake? A mouse? A bird?
- Can you see any animals nearby? If you can't see an animal, why?
- What might the animal be doing?



Create a list of items in nature to look for, listen to, and feel

- Here are some examples
 - Bumble bee, butterfly, lightning bug, spider, roly poly, worm, robin, cardinal, hawk, toad, yellow flower, the tallest tree
 - Something in the shape of a circle, a heart, a triangle
 - Something soft, rough, prickly, wet, dry, cold, hot, big, little, yellow, red, blue
- Think about your yard and your neighborhood and create your list from items you know you will find as well as items that will be more of a challenge



Helpful ideas for adults

☞ Start with the basics for your **youngest learners**, let them explore and make observations. Don't be surprised if they have some really incredible ideas when you discuss your observations with them. Have them place drawings in their nature journal. If they are not yet writing, ask them if they want you to write in their nature journal for them. Write down exactly what they are telling you. Do not edit or correct them.



☞ For your **older learners**, challenge them to think deeper into the questions. Have rich conversations discussing what, why and how. Ask open-ended questions. Encourage them to add detailed drawings and writings in their nature journals, just as a scientist would do.

☞ These do not need to be perfect artistic drawings or writings, which is not the goal of observing and data recording. The goal is to practice observational skills, spend time outdoors, and cultivate rich conversations.

☞ Can you think of more questions? Can those questions lead to a scientific investigation? (Make sure the questions are testable, to keep from getting discouraged.)

What makes a testable question?

Some questions are **“look up” questions**. These are questions with answers in books, or on the internet. Before you look up a question, discuss ideas with each other, and then look up the questions for further understanding. Example: How many miles from Earth to the moon?

Some questions are **not answerable** because you might not have the right tools and equipment, or enough time or experience, or maybe the question is just “too big”. These questions might be fun to talk about though. Example: How many fish are living in all the lakes in Wisconsin?

Some questions are **testable** because you have the tools, the time, and the knowledge to carry out the investigation. Example: Say you just found many caterpillars on a plant and you thought, “I wonder if the caterpillars would eat other plants too?” You could design an investigation to test which plants the caterpillars would eat.