

Exploring Nature

1st Grade Pre-Trip & Post-Trip Activity Suggestions

[Activities that support specific state standards have the standard's number listed in brackets.]

- Before the trip to Merry Lea have the students brainstorm a list of what they might see, smell, hear, feel when they visit the woods, meadow and pond during the current season. Keep a list of their ideas. After the field trip, compare their list to what they actually observed while at Merry Lea.

Some possible questions to start the brainstorming process:

- Might it be sunny, cloudy, windy, rainy?
 - Might they hear insects chirping and see some moving around?
 - Might there be birds singing?
 - Might there be frogs around?
 - Might they see mammals?
 - What would the trees look like?
 - Might there be flowers blooming?
 - Might the students hear the wind blowing through leaves?
- Discuss with the students the concept of “living” vs. “non-living”. (This concept will reviewed during the introduction to the day during your visit to Merry Lea and will continue to be addressed throughout the program.) [1.4.4]

We use the term “living” to refer to animals, plants and other organisms (fungi, bacteria, etc.) that have the characteristics listed below. We explain that in this context the term “living” also includes things that used to be alive but have died (like a stick on the ground that used to be part of a living tree). By “non-living” we mean other things that have never been and never will be alive (like rocks, clouds, sun, air, lightning, etc.).

Many living things...

Need air
Need water
Need food/nutrients of some sort
Grow
Can produce more things like themselves
Repair themselves when injured
Move

Non-living things...

Don't need air
Don't need water
Don't need “food”
Don't get larger on their own
Don't reproduce
Don't repair themselves
Don't move without an outside force

- Go for a school yard nature hike. This doesn't require a “natural” area – it can be on the playground, sidewalks, beside landscaping around the school, etc. Encourage students to do the same thing around their own homes. These observations could then be compared to those made by the group around the school.
 - Look for living things and non-living things.
 - Look & listen for signs of the season. (birds flocking for migration, squirrels hiding or looking for food, nests in trees, seeds on plants, new plants growing, etc.)
 - Look for small creatures like ants, pillbugs (“rollipollies”), slugs, worms, etc. Have students watch how they move, where they are going, what they are doing, what their bodies are shaped like, what size they are, etc. Compare these aspects of the different creatures. [standards 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.4.2]

- Play observation games/activities and use observation books to help prepare the students for making observations during explorations at Merry Lea. [1.1.1]
 - “What’s Missing?”

Hide a collection of objects under a cloth. If possible include both natural and human-made objects. Have the students sit around the cloth. Lift the cloth for a short time (perhaps 15 seconds) while the students look at all the objects. Cover the objects again. While the students close their eyes, remove one object from under the cloth. When this is done, have the students open their eyes again, lift the cloth for a short time and have the student try to figure out which object is missing. This can be repeated many times. An extension would be to have the students write descriptions of the objects they’ve been observing [1.2.7] and/or to have them sort the objects by various categories [1.1.1, 1.2.6].
 - The *I Spy* series of books by Jean Marzollo with photos by Walter Wick are wonderful examples of books that help children practice their visual observation skills. There are many other books (like the *Where’s Waldo?* series) that also help hone observation skills. See the bibliography for other ideas.

- Drawing from a Still-Life: [1.1.1]

The idea of this activity is to help the children start really observing natural objects. Since they don’t look at their drawing as they make it, they don’t judge it as “good” or “bad” while drawing. This is helpful for many children (and adults!) who have already gotten the sense that they “can’t” draw. If it seems helpful, remind the children that drawing is not photography – it’s not supposed to be an exact duplication of what is seen!

Gather a collection of natural objects (leaves, flowers, buds, cones, seeds, seed heads, feathers, rocks, shells, nests, etc.). Or, better yet, have the students help gather them outside! Arrange the objects into a still life. Have the students sit around the objects with paper and pencils and prepare to draw.

Explain that they will be asked to draw the arrangement without looking at their paper. They must make every effort to keep their eyes on the still-life and not on their paper while they draw. Have them let their pencil move about the paper while their eyes travel around the still-life. If their pencil runs off the paper, they should put it back on where it feels right.

When they are finished (5-10 minutes), have them turn their papers over without looking at their drawing. Then have them do a second drawing, this time allowing the students to look from the still-life to their papers. This drawing takes longer (often at least 20 minutes).

When they are finished with the second drawing, have them compare the two. Talk about the differences. With which one did they feel like they were really seeing the still-life better?

An alternative would be for each child to have their own object to draw or to have small groups gathered around several different still-lives.

Compare patterns/designs that occur in nature with patterns/designs people make.

This website has photos of many natural patterns:

http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/sirrobhitch.suffolk/patterns_nature/

Bibliography

Some of the following books are appropriate for first graders to read to themselves. Others would be more appropriate for someone to read aloud to the class. With some of these books you can work with the students on the concept of stories giving attributes to plants & animals that they don't really have [1.4.1].

A few selected seasonal books:

The Reasons for Seasons – Gail Gibbons. Holiday House, Inc., 1996.

Sunshine Makes the Seasons. – Franklyn Mansfield Branley. HarperCollins Children's Books, 1989.

Seasons – Peter D. Riley. Gareth Stevens Audio, 2003.

In the Small, Small Pond –Denise Fleming. Henry Holt & Co., Inc., 1995.

What's Alive? – Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld. HarperCollins Children's Books, 1995.

Walk When the Moon is Full – Frances Hamerstrom. Crossing Press, Inc., The, 1985.

How do Birds Find Their Way? – Roma Gans. HarperCollins, 1996.

Flute's Journey: The Life of a Wood Thrush – Lynne Cherry. Harcourt Brace & Co., 1997.

Spring:

Spring Moon – Jean Craighead George. Harper Trophy, 2002.

It's Spring! – Linda Glaser. Millbrook Press, 2002.

When Will it Be Spring?- Catherine Walters. Dutton Juvenile, 2001.

From Caterpillar to Butterfly – Deborah Heiligman. HarperCollins Children's Books, 1996.

From Tadpole to Frog – Wendy Pfeffer. HarperCollins Children's Books, 1994.

One Day in the Woods - Jean Craighead George. HarperCollins Children's Books, 1995.

A Nest Full of Eggs – Priscilla Belz Jenkins. HarperCollins, 1995.

Summer:

Summer Moon - Jean Craighead George. Harper Trophy, 2002.

In the Tall, Tall Grass –Denise Fleming. Henry Holt & Co., Inc., 199

It's Summer! – Linda Glaser. Millbrook Press, 2003.

Fall:

Time to Sleep – Denise Fleming. Henry Holt & Co., Inc., 2001.

Autumn Moon - Jean Craighead George. Harper Trophy, 2001.

How Do you Know it's Fall? – Allan Fowler. Scholastic Library Publishing, 1992.

It's Fall! – Linda Glaser. Millbrook Press, 2001.

Winter:

Winter Moon - Jean Craighead George. Harper Trophy, 2001.

Animals in Winter – Henrietta Bancroft. HarperCollins Children's Books, 1997.

It's Winter! – Linda Glaser. Millbrook Press, 2002.

Books for practicing observation skills:

Animalia – Graeme Base. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993.

The Water Hole – Graeme Base. Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

I Spy: Year-Round Challenger! – Jean Marzollo, Walter Wick. Scholastic, 2001.

I Spy Treasure Hunt – Jean Marzollo, Walter Wick. Scholastic, 1999.

I Spy Fantasy – Jean Marzollo, Walter Wick. Scholastic, 1994.

I Spy Fun House – Jean Marzollo, Walter Wick. Scholastic, 1993.

I Spy Ultimate Challenger – Jean Marzollo, Walter Wick. Scholastic, 2003.

I Spy School Days – Jean Marzollo, Walter Wick. Scholastic, 1995.