

Exploring Our Wild World, John Fark and Dennis Elliott

Class Description: Counselors, Teachers, parents and grandparents: Become the 'Pied Piper for your kids in exploring the natural world around them. Help kids (and yourself) understand and appreciate the mysterious relationships between plants and critters. Learn lots of fun activities to get young people excited about investigating the forest, the stream and their back yard. Bring your water proof boots, raincoat and outdoor wear.

Why do we want to bother teaching young people outdoors? It's because we know it excites them to get outside, 'the best class in school is recess!' It's a change of pace, out of the ordinary, it's different! It is also exciting because we are excited! Our enthusiasm is infectious.

"I like to play indoors better 'cause that's where all the electrical outlets are," reports a fourth-grader. Never before in history have children been so plugged in-and so out of touch with the natural world. In his groundbreaking new work "Lost Child In The Woods", child advocacy expert Richard Louv directly links the lack of nature in the lives of today's wired generation-he calls it nature deficit disorder. Relating it to some of the most disturbing childhood trends, such as rises in obesity, Attention Deficit Disorder (Add), and depression. Some startling facts: By the 1990s the radius around the home where children were allowed to roam on their own had shrunk to a ninth of what it had been in 1970. Today, average eight-year-olds are better able to identify cartoon characters than native species, such as beetles and oak trees, in their own community. The rate at which doctors prescribe antidepressants to children has doubled in the last five years, and recent studies show that too much computer use spells trouble for the developing mind. Nature-deficit disorder is not a medical condition; it is a description of the human costs of alienation from nature. This alienation damages children and shapes adults, families, and communities. There are solutions, though, and they're right in our own backyards. Cutting-edge research shows that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development-physical, emotional, and spiritual. What's more, nature is a potent therapy for depression, obesity, and Add. Environment-based education dramatically improves standardized test scores and grade point averages and develops skills in problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making. Even creativity is stimulated by childhood experiences in nature.

In our age of technology, it is more important than ever to give young people experiences that connect them with the environment. It is important to learn about the wonders of nature. Outdoor learning instills an appreciation for our place in the natural world and helps young people grow into responsible adults that value, respect and preserve the nature's balance. We feel good about teaching young people how to respectfully discover the outdoors because we are discovering and learning right beside them.

It is not necessary to have a detailed knowledge or taxonomy or a degree in environmental education. Using who, what, when, where, why and how questions to explore and relate discoveries provides authentic scientific research modeling. It also encourages involvement, creative thinking, understanding and confidence to 'dig deeper'. There may be no better way to ensure the well-being of the natural world tomorrow than to introduce young people to its many small wonders today.

Many of the activities shared in the class at BLW 2016 were taken and or adapted from the following references and resources.

Recommended References and Resources:

All of these books are full of philosophy and activities, site suggestions, seasonal suggestions, planning suggestions, material and equipment suggestions, discussion and questioning suggestions. All are available on Amazon.

1. 'Walk This Way, Classroom Hikes To Learning', Rebecca Olien, Beeline books, 1998, paperback, approx. \$10.
2. 'Fifteen Minutes Outside: 365 Ways to Get Out of the House and Connect with Your Kids, Rebecca Cohen, Sourcebooks Inc.; Paperback, 2011; approx. \$13
3. 'Sharing Nature with Children, 20th Anniversary Edition', Joseph Cornell, Dawn publications Inc., paperback, 1998; approx. \$10
4. Sharing Nature: Nature Awareness Activities for All Ages, Joseph Cornell Paperback, 2015, approx..\$16
5. Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder, Richard Louv Paperback, 2008, Approx. \$16