

Exploring Our Wild World, John Fark and Dennis Elliott

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

Sharing Nature With Children, 20th Anniversary Edition by Joseph Cornell

Combination of 'Sharing Nature With Children Editions I and II'.

Excellent Introduction (Preface to 1st Edition and 2nd Edition; teaching suggestions; Choosing Games)
This books leads the reader and teacher from first discovering the little things in nature to appreciating and envying the high Sierra wanderings of John Muir.

The following are very brief summaries of each activity, refer to the book for full activity instructions.

Section 1 – Getting in Touch

Pg 22 – Earth Window – Bury participants in Woods Stuff for a brief time – plastic sheets

Pg24 – Heart Beat of Tree – Feel movements and listen to sap flowing in tree – stethoscope

Pg 27 – Meet a Tree – Blindfolded feel, touch, hug, explore, get acquainted with a specific tree – blindfolds

Pg 31 – Blind Trail – Follow a cord up, down, under, around, over trees, logs branches, bushes, holes, etc. Long small rope, blindfolds

Pg 33 - Role Playing – Role Play actions of specific plant, animal, tree, rock, insect, etc. – charades - none

Section 2 – How Much Can You See?

Pg 40 - Sounds and Colors – Lay/sit down quiet, hold a new finger up each new sound heard - plastic sheets - identify, point out and describe each new color -none

Pg 42 - Unnatural Trail – Walk down designated length of trail, quietly count manmade objects observed, Several attempts, 25 – 30 med /small manmade objects

Pg 46 – Caterpillar walk – Blind walk 4-5 person segments through thick woods on a serpentine trail, Remember sounds, feels, smells, touches, draw map, find way back to start – papers, pencils, blindfolds

Pg 42 – Back Home – Lead blindfolded individuals 30-40 ft to a spot, explore-become familiar, lead back, blindfolds off , find their spot - blindfolds

Pg 48– Duplication – Lay 15-20 natural items on bandana, cover, uncover 25 seconds, go find duplicates – 2 lrg bandanas/towels

Pg 50 - Micro Hike – Hand out 3-5 ft piece of string, groups 2, have them lay string through interesting area, explore and list everything found within 1 or 2 in of string - String, magnifying glass, paper, pencil

Section 3 – Natures Balance

Pg 54 – Pyramid of Life – All secretly write name of plant, or animal on a card build pyramid, 1st row - plants on bottom, 2nd row-plant eaters (herbivores) on plants, 3rd row - animal eaters plant eaters (carnivores), 4th row Top predators, adjust numbers of each to balance, discussion questions - 3x5 cards, pencil

Pg 58 – Recipe for Forest – Deed to 1 sq mile flat bare land, use wildest imagination to list all ingredients to build and shape your dream forest draw picture, Notepads/ pencils

Pg 60 – Webbing – circle, pass unroll string to basic foundation ingredients of life, -soil, air, water, pass to related what plants live here, - insects, animals, plants, etc. Lose one, web collapses- ball of string

Pg 62 – Predator Pray – Circle, Name predator – blindfolded/bells in circle, name a prey – blindfolded/bells in circle, Predator and Prey imitates animal, hunt capture (tag) - bells, blindfolds

Pg 64 – Plant Succession Crawl – crawl like snake away from pond water’s edge, list changes in plants, soil, smell, draw map, Paper, pencil

Section 4 – Learning is Fun

Pg 70 - Noses – read 8 hard to easy clues to identity of animal, when you know put finger on nose (you knowse the answer) pg 70 -71, pg159-163

Pg 76 - Identification Game- 7-10 specimens of plants on center line between lines of 2 teams 30 ft apart. Call plant name and number of player. Correct earn 2 pts, wrong lose 2 Specimens, 2 lines (string, rope)

Pg 85- Random Scavenger Hunt – 5 min. to find as many things as possible on the list!
Scavenger lists, pencil

Pg 86 – Wild Animal Scramble – Pin animal name / picture on everyone’s back, owner asks others questions to discover the animal that can only be answered yes, no, maybe, or don’t know.
– Cards with animal names/pictures

Pg- 89- Noah’s Ark – find your mate on Noah’s Ark by only making distinctive animal noises/movements. Randomly pass out cards with animal names and recollect. Go on signal. - animal names cards (2 ea)

Pg 90 – Animal Parts – 4-5 member teams select animal/insect to pantomime and act out in charades for others to guess. (none)

Pg 92 – Animal Clue Relay – Large 38 ft diam. rope circle with 4-5 member teams outside; name teams;30 animal clue cards, 6 ea. for 5 significantly different animals face up in center; one team member goes in for one clue card at a time to bring out and show team; return card for new card; discover identity of all 5 animals.

Section 5 – Play and Discovery

Pg 100 – Catch the Horse – Tall grass chase game

Pg 102 – Camouflage – late evening semi dark, searchers – hiders game

Pg 104 – Wildmen in the Alders – Cat / mouse game – sneak through the woods, don’t get caught by wildmen

Pg 106 – Sleeping Miser – Sneak up to sleeping (blindfolded) miser- steal his treasure, be pointed- get frozen

Pg 108 – Bat& Moth – Blindfolded bat tries to capture ‘touch’ moth in people circle, bat squeaks out ‘bat’ sonar- moth must reply ‘moth’ while eluding the bat

Pg 110 – Watcher of the Road – Blindfolded watcher-middle of wide path with flashlight, all others sneak past without being ‘flashed’ by a burst of light

Section 6 – Spotting and Attracting Animals

Pg 114 – Bird Calling – ‘psssh’ call

Pg 118 – Bird on a Stick – hold long stick, wrap in drab blanket, use ‘psssh’ call

Pg 120 – Predator Calling – various techniques

Pg 122 – Recon Hike – Full camo, intensive activity

Section 7 – Journey to the Heart of Nature

Pg 124-137 - A series of related activities for intensive repeated visits to a self-selected 'special place'.
Involves in-depth exploration, journaling, mapping and sharing.

Section 8 – Adventures

Pg 140 – Still Hunting

Pg 142 – Sunset Watch – record observations (suggested starter list) as daylight turns to dark)

Pg 146 – Night World - night hike tips

Pg 148 – Survival tips – Very basic tips for conducting a 'survival' experience.

Pg 150 – Folding Poems –

Pg 152 – Expanding – When we enter the world of nature with openness, splendid experiences come!

Pg 155-157 Silent Sharing Walk

Pg 159 - Appendix of lists and tools to make some of the learning activities easier for the 'teacher'.

Walk This Way – Classroom Hikes to Learning by Rebecca Olien

The following are very brief summaries of each chapter and activities, refer to the book for full activity instructions.

Pg 1 Chap 1 – Getting Started

Suggestions for planning the hike, getting support, managing materials, setting the tone, and questioning techniques, basic ecological concepts of appreciation, diversity, survival needs and interdependence, protection of people, protection of environment, and group management by stating expectations, keeping the group together, keeping them involved, being flexible, doing follow-up and evaluation.

Pg 9 Chap 2 Nature Notebooks

What does a notebook look like, how do you get started, helping participants think about what they already know, stimulate critical thinking and summarizing through maps, lists, and open questions.

Pg 13 Chap 3 - Rainbow Ramble – Discover Color In Nature – colorful art prints, sample paint strips, small paintbrush, small container water, watercolor paint kit, 3x5 cardboard picture frames, Activities - Magic paint brush, matchups paint strips, window Frames, natures crayons.
Additional Options – Pg 17-18

Pg 1 Chap 4 - Follow Your Nose – Animals Sense of Smell – mist sprayer, Nose Knows questions, Take the Nose Knows Quiz - Discuss

Small sealed bottle samples of common smells – onion, cinnamon, pepper, orange peel, vanilla, burned wood, chocolate, lemon, soap, etc. to pass around and identify.

Collect items from nature – different twigs, bark, soil, stones, grass, leaves, smell different trees; etc.

Crush items - smell identify; mist with water – smell identify; smell air in different locations – pond, pine woods, swamp, stream, under leaves, in soil, in a hollow, meadow, plowed field, hay field, etc.

Collect several items, eyes closed – partner sniff and ID;

What smells elicit fear, joy, repulsion, pleasure, comfort, etc. in humans?

Animals sense – what smells would animals notice, fear, seek, etc.

Additional Options – 24 -25

Pg 26 Chap 5 - Sounds of Silence – Training our ears to tune in to natural sounds

Set Tone Activity - Grocery Bag with a collection of objects that make a sound stapler, scissors, bell, water bottle, plastic bag, keys, paper tearing, pen click, jar of stones, fishing reel, etc. ;

Have them number and write down guess the sound of each; Share guesses,- then take them out make the sound.

Sound Chart Activity – Make a list of nature sounds and what makes them. Notebook/Pencil
Sounds of Silence Questions sheet-

Make Megaphones – listen through them, increase hearing, what animals have large ears/ small?

Make Film Canister Nature Rattlers – seeds, stones, water, twigs, sand, etc. guess what's inside

Play Sound Tag with rattlers – one is blind bull frog tagging insects that can freeze for 5 sec. to escape

Timer Hide and Seek – wind up a timer, hide it off the side of a trail, finder gets to hide it.

Wrap Up – What new sounds can be added to sound chart?

Additional Options –Pg 32 -33

Pg 34 Chap 6 - Touchy Business – Unique Texture Differences

Prepare patches of materials –beans, rice, fine and coarse sandpaper, cotton, felt, leather, plastic, cardboard, velvet, gravel, etc.- pass them around and write a list of ‘touch’ words describing the texture feel to use as a common language.

Feely Bags – have a collection of bags/ socks with natural objects in each – maple seeds, pine needles, beans, pine cone, dry leaves, sand, acorns, bark, corn, walnut, pebbles, milk weed pod, grass, hell, flower, rice, sawdust, mud, etc.

Option – Empty bags and students find objects for their own bag, - share/describe/guess.

Stone of Your Own – students select a stone, look feel and carefully to memorize their stone, place stone in a pile or common container, each person take turns selecting out their own stone blindfolded.

Tree Touching – Select a grove of similar trees and have students partner up and select their own tree and explore it carefully with eyes open and closed. Then come together and blindfold one, the other safely circuitously leading their partner around to various trees until the blind finds ‘their’ tree, reverse rolls.

Texture Rub – use paper, crayons/ chalk/pencil to make a rubbing(s) of several objects textures. Share

Rope Walk – Set up a long rope up, down, and around through the woods tying loop knots where you want students to feel something. Plant items to fill spaces. Sighted (or blindfolded) students walk, identify and close eyes to feel. Retrace to discuss object memory from each stop.

Texture Scavenger Hunt – Individuals /partners collect items matching textures from list #1 or #2 (more challenging) Share and discuss

Texture Hunt – In X? time students collect as many different new textures objects as they can.

Wrap Up – Make individual (or group) texture collage, grouping textures, labeling, - or not?

Additional Options – pg 39 – 40

Pg 41 Chap 7 - As The Crow Flies – Bird Watching

Draw a bird - just a oval?!, -ask for parts of a bird, make a list, students draw their own bird using all parts listed and others, are they all same? What’s different, Different Birds.

Ask and list how you tell birds apart – (size, color, shapes, flight, habitat, feathers, sounds, nests, etc.)

Hansel and Gretel- spread out breadcrumbs and bird feed along a section of path on way out, see birds and what’s left on way back.

Calling All Birds – Play tape to call birds, mouth bird calls, record bird calls to study and attract birds.

Fluffy Feathers – get a sampling of feathers - tail, wing, down; look with magnify glass- different structures,- functions? What happens - spray with water? Blow on them? Drop it? How keep clean?

Wrap UP – Where are most bird? Why? What is good habitat? Different? Favorite birds? What enjoy about birds? Why some nuisance? How to attract birds?

Additional Options – Pg 46 -47

Pg 48 Chap 8 – From Tree To Tree – Learning About Natures Green Giants

Draw a Tree – Name as many trees as you can? List, How do you tell trees apart? Draw a tree. What are the parts of tree? List? Add parts to drawing. What is special/different about trees? Anyone have a special tree? What? How make you feel? What can you see from here that comes from trees? List? What foods come from trees? (fruits, bananas, oranges, lemons, apples, nuts, maple syrup, chocolate, etc.)

Photocopy common leaves for hike activities. Match photo ID leaves to leaves found in woods.
I Spy A Tree – Choose a tree and say “I Spy A Tree”. Only answer questions with yes or no until the tree is discovered. Divide large groups into several games.

If You Were a Tree- Using a creative narrative, describe a small acorn sending out its first root and growing all the way to the tall tree while students act out the growing.

Measure Up – 2 pages describing how to use a hand, fingers and fellow student’s height to measure a tree’s height and circumference.

Leaf Relay –

2 separate piles of leaves from the immediate area

Divide into two teams, each in a line 25 ft behind each pile

On Go!, the first member of each team race down, pick up leaf and race to a tree it belongs to. Upon reaching the tree the second person races to the leaf pile etc.

Tree Tag – ‘It’ calls out tree species, anyone touching that tree is safe.

It can call another ‘safe’ tree (up to 3 times) at which time the previous tree is not safe.

Anyone tagged is an ‘it helper’, last one caught is new it.

Very Vein – Pick up leaf and compare the veins to your veins in your hand. Discuss similarity of veins moving nutrients up and down through your body and the tree. While trees make food for themselves carbon dioxide and sunlight, they make oxygen we need to breathe. Trace a leaf and veins. Make a leaf rubbing. Care various tree shapes and veining.

Tree Detective Question Sheet- pg 54-56

Wrap Up –Share a treat of all tree products- apples, tree nuts, dried fruit /apricots/ peaches, cinnamon or maple candy, coconut, chocolate, etc. Review and share ‘tree’ experiences and reactions while eating tree snacks, lying in the shade and adding to your original tree drawings.

Additional Options – pg 56-57

Pg 59-66 Chapter 9 - Weather Watchers

A collection of weather questions and discussion topics about weather signs, and activities including temperature, reading wind, cloud ID and watching, seeking shelter from various weather conditions and pondering what a puddle can tell you.

Pg 66 Chap 10 - Rock On – Rocks Earth History

Rock Acquaintance - Have a bucket of rocks to handle, try to have as many different kinds of rocks as possible; Consider a Rock collection Kit; Play “find a rock” that - sparkles, smooth, one color, many colors, sharp edges, stripes, flat, round, etc.; Play ‘I Spy’; do a rock collection hike; Use a watercolor paint brush to ‘paint’ rocks with water; Float some pumice rock; Discuss Igneous Rock / Sedimentary Rock / Metamorphic Rock; Look for fossils; Test for pH/alkalinity, weight, hardness, streak test white enamel, luster(sparkle/shine in bright light), Strike test for spark; What are all the ways that break rocks down into smaller rocks, sand and dust; polished rocks/ lapidary

Pg 75 Chap 11 – 10 Minute ‘Treasure Hunts’

Scoping for Treasure with rolled paper ‘scope’ to create focus both far away and up close;

Belly Flop down and look closely through the eyes of an insect;

Centimeter Search for anything one centimeter long;

Camouflage – partly camouflage and hide a manmade object (pencil) for others to try to find.

Inner View – Take apart a small object (acorn, maple seed, pine cone) look for structure, texture, shapes, colors, and guess functions

Super Snoopers- A ten minute detective hunt scouring for ‘evidence’ of animal/bird/insect presence.

Tiny Trails – Create a tiny nature trail that an ant would enjoy with yarn showing the way and sticks marking ‘interesting’ stopping points.

Tiny Treasures – Collect 10 tiny treasures (nothing soggy, protected or rare) in a sandwich bag to help remember your outdoor experience.

Pg 83 Conservation Hike - Being Earth Stewards – Trail Activities

Chart the Course of Action – Chart or list and rank positive and negative evidence of human behaviors.

Pont the Way – the direction to trash bins with sticks or chalk

Walk Softly – A ‘judge’ student stands at the end of a littered path while others try to ‘walk softly’ past the judge. The one that gets the farthest is the next judge.

Diversity – Survey and List / Chart all the different kinds of plants animals in an specific area. Do two in different areas and compare. Which is environmentally healthier and why.

Slide Show – Take pictures of examples of human desecration, make a slide show with narration, music

Trash Monster – Collect liter in a bag as you hike and mount it on a trash monster cardboard. What makes it ugly?, What is ugliest?, What will last longest?, How can we eliminate trash monsters?

Trash Report Card – Decide what ‘subjects’ are on the ‘trash report card’, What ‘grades’ will be given, what are the expectations to be able to receive respective grades, what grade each ‘subject’ gets, and what will be the ‘final grade’.