

Day Three Activity- Exploring Nature

(Optional Recording Sheet Found in Student Activity Pack)

Madison and Cole learned about important ecosystems in their local environment and why they needed to take good care of them. An ecosystem is a community of living organisms and the natural world in which they inhabit, all of which are connected.

Today you are going to explore the world around you. Your goal is to see if you can notice things you haven't noticed before, consider how things in your environment are connected, and how you are connected to your environment as well. Your other goal is to just have fun! The more of your senses you use to observe the world around you (sight, touch, smell, hearing, taste—only for things that are safe to eat), the more you will discover!

Note to adults and older independent kids: You can approach this however you want. If you have one, take a magnifying glass outside along with a piece of paper and something to write or draw with (and on). You can use these to record your observations and draw some of the things you see. Alternatively, or in addition, you can take pictures to record some of your observations. Or, just take yourself outside with a curious mind, and sharp observational skills. You can go on a walk, or explore a yard, or a park. You can look over a large area, or sit still in a small area and see what all you can observe. These instructions and ideas for exploring are broad because you will all have access to different environments.

If you don't know where to start in exploring your environment, here are examples of things to look for and think about:

Close your eyes and be still for at least a couple minutes. What do you hear? What do you feel? Can you feel the air moving around you? The sun or rain? How might these things affect other things in your environment – plants, animals (including you), the land and any bodies of water that may be around you?

Water – is there a pond near you? Do you see anything swimming in it or any bugs near the surface? What's growing in and around it? If you are silent and still can you hear or see signs of frogs or any other animals? Take a clear cup and scoop up some pond water. What do you see in your cup?

If you have access to a stream or river make similar observations as above. Where is the water coming from? Where is it going? What plants and animals rely on this body of water? Think about all the ways you and your family use water throughout the day.

Are there any birds or other animals that you notice? What observations can you make? What are they interacting with (trees, dirt, plants, flowers, each other)?

Do you see trees? What can you observe about them? Look at their trunks, their bark, branches and leaves. How many different types of trees do you see? Are there any animals in the trees? Do you think any of them live there? What is your evidence?

Did you find a pine cone? Is it open or shut tight? Big or small? Can you find the spiral patterns in the cone?

Notice the plants. How many different types do you see? Observe some closely. Notice their structure. Look for details.

Examine leaves. Sometimes if you shine light into leaves you can see structures inside them that you didn't notice before. Look at the lines and patterns. Compare different types of leaves.

75% of plants need pollinators to reproduce. Think of what that means for us in terms of the food we eat and the air we breathe! Pollinators are animals and insects that help pollen made by plants get to eggs made by the same type of plants. Together the pollen plus the eggs produce the plant seeds. Pollinators include birds, bats, moths, flies, bees, beetles, and butterflies. How many pollinators can you find?

Bugs! What different types can you find? What do they look like? Do they fly or crawl? Are they alone or "in a herd"? Look on leaves and flowers, under rocks, in sidewalk cracks, or just get close to the ground and see what you can see.

Don't forget the ground. Find and compare different rocks. Explore the soil. Is it coarse (big particles like sand) or fine (small particles like flour)? Are there worms? Worms help keep the soil healthy. Did you know earthworms form herds? There is a lot to be curious and wonder about in our world.

This is a lot of observing. If you can't do it all that's okay. Again, your goal is to notice things you may not have noticed before, consider how the things you observed are connected and think about how you are also connected to the world around you. Oh, and have fun exploring!