



## Suggestions and Ideas for Taking Children into the Wild

- **Practicalities and Safety**
  - Inform parents of your new “Outdoor First, Rain or Shine” policy, and why.
  - Have parents send a second set of clothing and boots or outdoor footwear that can get really dirty!
  - Gather up second hand clothing to have on hand.
  - Find a source of plastic ponchos for everyone.
  - If going somewhere new, have someone go there ahead of time to scope out dangerous garbage.
  - Each person has a team. Take along older school aged children as helpers.
  - You may notice that children are happier outdoors than in!
  
- **Get over the fear** of not knowing the names of trees, plants, birds, etc. (Adults show children movies and do not know the names of all the characters and creatures in the movie). People often forget a name if given a long list of names. It is more important to observe and appreciate the plant/bird etc. than it is to learn its name. The leader can ask some questions about it: (*curriculum: reflection, Imagination, creativity*)
  - **How did it get here?**
    - If a tree or plant, look for where a seed may have come from.
  - **What is it doing?**
    - Making a home, growing, building a nest
  - **How is it getting food?**
    - Look at roots
  - **What would the bird or animal eat?**
    - Look for signs of chewing on plants and trees etc.
    - Droppings or scats
    - Insects for bird food
  - Ask the children what they would name the item, and tell why that name was chosen.
  - Take a picture and look in a book later to see if they can find the plant, bird, animal they were observing
  
- **Tracks**, especially in snow, are always interesting. Once children see a few animal or bird tracks, they will find many more. Ask questions:
  - What made this track- a big or small animal, or a bird?
  - Did more than one animal walk here?
  - Which way was it going?
  - How long ago did it walk here?
  - Was it easy for the animal to walk here?
  
- **Adopt a tree** that the children visit many times. It can be a tree under which they have a picnic or a gathering spot at the start or finish of an outing or a special resting spot, or a story time location. (*curriculum: ‘Noticing regularity, repetition, and changes in nature’*)

pp 174.)

- Look at the bottom of the tree- can they see roots?
  - Look up through the branches- doing this many times a year allows them to see how their tree changes with the seasons. Have them see how different the sky looks through a tree with leaves, compared to a tree without leaves.
    - Where do the leaves go when they fall?
    - What colour are the leaves? What sounds do they make?
    - Look for buds. Are they bigger than the last time you looked at the tree?
    - In anything living on their tree? Insects, birds? Moss? Fungus?
    - How old do they think the tree is?
    - They could draw a picture of their tree
    - do a bark rubbing
    - many other questions and topics relate to one tree
- Have children pretend they are a tree. Their roots are in one place, but their bodies can sway and bend with the wind. They can stretch up tall as if growing. How do they get food? It has to be made from the sun and air. Water comes from rain and in soil. It is a good way to show children the importance of remembering to care for plants. If they forget to water a plant, the plant can not run and get water itself.

- To help children “bring all their senses to exploring nature” (pp 172):

**Sense of touch:**

- Place 2 or 3 distinctly different objects in a box or bag. The children must not be able to see into the box or bag. By reaching a hand into the bag, the child feels the objects and based on the size, texture, etc. then tries to locate a similar object in the nearby area.
  - Also touch bark. Branches, leaves, moss, etc. to compare textures.

**Sense of hearing:**

- Have the group listen to sounds in different places and at different times of day.
  - When is it noisiest?
  - Where is it quietest?
  - Can they hear birds singing?
  - Are all the birds' songs the same?
  - Can they imitate the bird song?
- Listen to rain on leaves, hats, puddles, etc.
- Splash in puddles. Does that sound like rain?
- Listen for insects, singing, buzzing, etc.
- Run through fall autumn leaves. What sounds does this make?

**Sense of sight and observation:**

- Objects along a trail: Place objects along a trail and see how many the children can find.

Some can be natural; others man made and brightly coloured.

- Give children paint charts and see if they can find something natural that is the same colour as on their paint chart.
- Examine bird feathers found on the ground. Was it from a big or small bird? As a bird preens its feathers. The sections of the feather come apart and rejoin. By looking closely at how parts of feathers come apart and together, people invented velcro.
- After many of the leaves have fallen in the autumn, find as many different seeds as possible. Then show each one to the children and have them find a similar seed under the leaves. You can take an example back and find which tree it matches.
- Dig down through layers of leaves in the spring to see different stages of decay.
  - You can go back and start a compost bin with your own vegetable peelings. (*Modeling sustainability*)

### **Sense of smell:**

- Stop and smell the flowers! Not all flowers have a smell or scent, but many do. The only way to find out if a flower has a scent is to smell it. Then you will know.
- When going outside you may want to suggest **themes or topics** of special interest for the day. Examples are:
- signs of spring/ or fall/ or winter/ or summer
  - animal homes
  - preparing for winter (how animals and plants do this)
  - how did this (plant/ animal) get here?
  - How seeds spread.

**\*\*Caution:** *in all the outside activities please be respectful of the natural environment. Remember it is “home” to many living things (birds, animals, insects, trees, other plants, etc.). Do not pick wild flowers unless dandelions or other common roadside flowers. Leave animals and birds where they are even if, and especially if, they are young or baby birds and animals. Replace logs, moss and other items you move. Leave birds' nests for birds. Remember if everyone that visited an area took something away, soon there would not be much of interest left.(this is Modeling “connecting to and respecting the natural world” pp172)*

## **Resources**

**Children & Nature Network:** [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)

**Child and Nature Alliance:** [www.childnature.ca](http://www.childnature.ca)

**Evergreen Foundation** [www.evergreen.ca](http://www.evergreen.ca) great Canadian resource for creating natural playspaces

**Steve Van Matre** – Earth Education...A New Beginning (book), [www.eartheducation.org](http://www.eartheducation.org)

**Joseph Cornell** – Sharing Nature Foundation, [www.sharingnature.com](http://www.sharingnature.com)

Books: Sharing Nature with Children, Sharing Nature with Children II

**Resource People:**

**Nature NB:** [www.naturenb.ca](http://www.naturenb.ca)

**New Brunswick Lung Association's Healthy Child Care program:**

[www.nb.lung.ca](http://www.nb.lung.ca) click on "Child Care Action Kit"

**Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, NB** [www.cpawsnb.org](http://www.cpawsnb.org)

**Ian Smith:** 366-3223

**Jane Hadley:** 474-0422

**Ron and Liz Smith:** 453-1792

**Janet Barlow** – Sense of Wonder Environmental Education, [www.senseofwonderee.ca](http://www.senseofwonderee.ca)

Janet uses principles from the Sharing Nature Foundation (she's the Canada Country Coordinator) and has been trained by Joseph Cornell and Steve Van Matre. She is based out of Halifax.

E-mail: [wonder@senseofwonderee.ca](mailto:wonder@senseofwonderee.ca)

Phone: (902) 494-7644