

Naturebook Early Years Activities

Siren Conservation Education

Sensing nature

These activities were developed for use with 2-5 year olds on a series of trips to natural woodland sites. They would also work in the grounds of children's centres and nurseries. They promote vocabulary and experiencing nature with all the senses.

TOUCHING

Texture Trail

- Preparation

Lay out a touch trail

Attach brightly coloured labels with texture words to different items along the trail

e.g.

Smooth to smooth tree trunk

Rough to rough tree trunk

Squidgy to a muddy spot

Spiky to a holly tree or bramble bush

- Activity

Children run along trail and find labels. Adults ask children to feel the items and share the words with them.

Comments: Children enjoyed running along the trail and finding things. Need to explain to parents that it is not a competition but a chance to discuss the things they find using different words for texture.

Building mini-shelters

Introduce children to some small toy creature (e.g. a pinecone with eyes, or a toy mouse)

Provide building materials (sticks, leaves, sand, sheeps wool)

Suggest that the children and adults build houses for the creatures

Discuss the textures and purposes of the different items (e.g. soft leaves or sheeps wool as a blanket to keep the creature warm, hard sticks to hold the house up)



Comments: It was icy so children made windows for the houses with ice panes, using the words cold and see-through, thick and thin. Older children (4-5) and their parents would need to be 'into' imaginative play to enjoy this activity.

Feely bottle-bag

We used a 6 compartment bottle bag to make a feely bag, by sewing folded material to the top of the bag so that you couldn't see what was inside. Children put hands in to find out what's at the bottom of each compartment. Discuss the textures they find and then reveal what it is.

We used sheeps wool, pinecones, dried leaves, smooth stones, walnut shell, and fresh leaves

SEEING

Photography

Give children digital cameras to take photographs. Can suggest that they look for different colour items, or special things that want to find out more about. This works well if a display or book will be made following the trip or event.

Comments: This activity is very popular with the children!



Natural collage

- Preparation

Child-safe glue

A plywood board painted white, or set of trays

- Activity

Go for a walk and collect fallen leaves, twigs, pinecones, blossom etc. Discuss the different colours and shapes. Bring the items back to a 'canvas' or painted plywood board and lay them out to form a collage. Parents and children can work together on their own projects, or a make a collective project – abstract or representational of things they have seen at the site.

Nancy Gladstone, April 2012



Comments: We used flour and water mixture as glue which stuck but the items couldn't be taken home. For a dry day, paper and stick glue would work well and enable the item to be taken home.

This is a chance to discuss why it might be better not to pick special plants and flowers, although if the site allows, you could pick some leaves from trees.

LISTENING

A listening walk

Walk quietly. Stop and listen at different places. Ask children what they can hear. Talk about birdsong. If you have a mobile phone, you could play some different calls e.g. woodpecker's yaffle.

Natural music

Bring musical instruments made of natural materials (e.g. djembe drum, wooden guitar, wooden shakers etc.) Discuss what they are made of.

Talk about people who live in the forest who use natural items to make music. Try tapping and scraping tree trunks and fallen branches to see what noise they make. See if children can think of any other ways to make music in the forest. Sing a song

We've got another musical instrument here – can anybody guess what it is? Give a clue by singing a note. It's our voices. Sing a natural version of wheels on the bus, with appropriate actions:

The wind in the trees goes

Whoosh whoosh whoosh, whoosh whoosh whoosh, whoosh whoosh whoosh

The leaves on the trees go

Rustle rustle rustle

The birds in the air go

Flap flap tweet

All day long

Make your own instrument

Bring toilet rolls, masking tape and cardboard to make your own musical instrument. Collect small stones to put inside to make a shaker.

Nancy Gladstone, April 2012

Comment: Adults could try making something more complex, like a xylophone from different lengths of dry wood

Sound story

Give each child a musical instrument and encourage them to play along with the story. Our story was about a proud peacock who did not want to get his tail wet (as we had seen peacocks the week before). The proud peacock heard the wind in the trees and he was worried that there was going to be a storm. When he heard to rain start to pitter patter on the ground, he ran this way and that looking for a place to shelter. Luckily he found a nice cave. He went inside and heard the rain getting louder and louder. (If the children seem robust, you can add in some thunder and lightning). He hoped it would be over soon because he wanted to go out and show everyone his tail again. Soon the rain started to get quieter and quieter and quieter. When all he could hear was the wind in the trees, he poked his head outside. No rain, so out he went. And as the sun came out, he opened up his wonderful tail for all the world to see (stretch out arms or strum a chord on guitar).

SMELL

Natural smell pots

Prepare some plastic jars with lids with fresh mashed herbs or dried herbs in a little water

Rosemary, mint, walnut leaves, tarragon, crushed garlic or wild garlic leaves, rose or lavender petals

Adults can guess the smells, children could describe the smells and say if they are nice or nasty. You could show pictures or bring uncrushed leaves/flowers to show as well.

A smelling walk

Go for a walk and stop to smell flowers, herbs and leaves. Discuss why things smell. E.g. Flowers have a nice smell to attract insects. Leaves (e.g. walnut leaves, herbs) have a very strong smell to put insects off eating them.

TASTE

Light a fire

Bring a large frying pan and a drop scone batter.

Cook drop scones and serve them with butter, honey and jam. Talk about where the honey and jam come from.