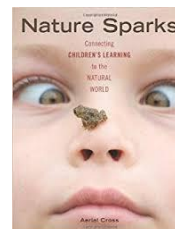


Nature at Your Door

Resource for Activities: Nature Sparks by Aerial Cross



Other Great Resources

Websites

Community Playthings

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Books

The Great Outdoors by Mary Rivkin

Healthy Children, Healthy Lives by S. Ergen and R. Robertson

Cultivating Outdoor Classrooms by Eric Nelson

Discovering Nature with Young Children by Chalufour and Worth

Worms, Shadows, and Whirlpools by Worth & Grollman

Fab Lab: Outdoor Lab Work

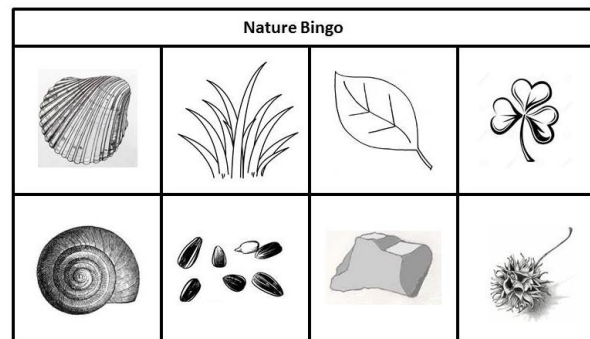
- Outdoor “lab” work is especially wonderful after a rainstorm.
- The air and surroundings are fresh and vibrant in color and smell.
- Children can compare and contrast a variety of specimens—such as dirt, sand, and rainwater---in laboratory beakers.
- Set out lab coats, magnifying glasses, and goggles.
- Fill plastic beakers full of vinegar, water, oil, and other odorous mixtures and homemade solutions.
- Dye beaker contents neon green, blue, and yellow.

Quill Pens and More

- Have children sit outside and write observations in their nature journals.
- Offer a variety of sketching pens and pencils.
- Quill pens can be made from bird feathers and provide unique writing opportunities.
 - Use thin paint as quill ink.
- Get students started by suggesting they sketch a blooming flower bud, moss-covered bark, or a hovering cloud.

Nature Sensory Bingo

- Turn lotto games into nature bingo by using actual objects from nature.
- Students must match a drawn item with its placeholder.
- Collect the following items to use as nature bingo placeholders.
 - Feather, acorn, wildflower, rock, leaf, cattail, pine needle, piece of charred wood, bone of some kind, fossil, pinecone, burr, cocoon, twig with a bud, piece of straw.



Earthquakes

- To give children an earth-shaking earthquake experience, bring in a large comforter and have them take turns sitting in the middle of it.
- Instruct the other children to stand around the edge of the blanket and shake it back and forth, jiggling the blanket.
- Toss small balls in the middle for added sensory flare.
- This would make a great introductory activity to earthquakes for kindergarten children.

Inclement Weather Dress-Up

- On especially snowy or rainy days, when students are trapped indoors, grant time to dress up in imaginative, weather-themed costumes.
- Don a costume yourself for the day; maybe a bright-colored floral apron and crown as Ms. May Day.
- Other ideas include: The Snow Fairy, The Rain Princess, Mr. March Wind, or Father Fog.
- To accommodate the costumes, fill a large box with colorful raincoats, wigs, sunglasses, artificial flowers, and a variety of their imaginative props, such as homemade butterfly wings and an assortment of finger puppets. Read connecting stories to activate student imaginations. The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch is a classic.

Monet Paintings

- Introduce children to the beautiful landscapes and nature paintings of Claude Monet through prints.
- Have children finger paint with boldly colored finger paints or softer pastels while standing at easels or picnic tables.
- Baby Monet: Discovering the Seasons, is a good video for young children. It is part of the Baby Einstein series.
- Follow up with Discover the Seasons by Diane Iverson, a perfect book for teaching children ages three and up about winter, fall, spring, and summer.

Mud Masterpieces

- What makes the best mud pies?
- Tell students that masterful mud pies don't crumble.
- They hold together like a hamburger patty.
- Let students explore mud and sand concoctions using a variety of materials to see which stuff makes the best mud pie.
- Let children experiment with oozy, gooey, gritty, and mushy mud textures by changing the amount of water and toss-ins in the mix.
- Have students add more sand than mud or more mud than sand. What happens? Mix in a handful of natural clay. What happens to the mixture then?
- Add dried leaves, grass clippings, or straw.
- Have students record their observations and findings in their nature journals to answer the question: "What makes the best mud pie?"

Nature Experiments

- The possibilities available for performing simple nature experiments with children are endless.
- Investigate and grow mold or crystals.
- Create static with balloons rubbed on students' hair.
- Here's an especially simple one: fill a clear plastic jar with rain- or pond water and let students observe how it changes.
- They will likely observe the growth of green algae and mosquito larvae.
- Cover the top of the jar with old pantyhose to keep the experiment contained, especially when growing bugs.
- Resources for nature experiments are online. Try <http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/nature-experiments-for-kids.htm>

Basic Bird Pudding Recipe

- Mix 1 cup dried fruit
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bacon bits
- 2 cups lard
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup birdseed in a bowl
- Heat 2 cups lard in a saucepan until it melts and comes to slow boil
- Mix the lard drippings with the dried fruit, bacon bits, bread crumbs, and birdseed and stir until well coated.
- Before the mixture cools, put it into bird-feeding containers.
- Hang or place them where you want to observe birds feeding.

Investigate Flowers

- Let children take flowers apart to closely investigate petals and stems.
- Have students measure, sort, and graph a variety of donated flowers.
- If flowers are not available from a natural setting, call a local florist and ask for cuttings and trimmings.

Build a Bug

- Using natural clay, let children build a bug.
- Offer small twigs or pipe cleaners for insect legs, antennae, and other insect parts.
- Most early childhood curricula focus largely on butterflies or pill bugs when studying insects.
- Educators should allow children to observe a wide variety of insects, including topical and exotic ones.
- Why not try Madagascar hissing cockroaches? They can be purchased from educational supply stores along with everything needed for their care, such as a cage, food, and instructions.

Bug Hunting Kits

- hand lenses, aquarium nets, tweezers, baby food jars, jewelry boxes, small note pads and pencils

Nature Matching

- Take pictures of a variety of nature items.
- Show children the pictures and have them pair each picture to its counterpart outside.
- Make some of the pictures easy to match, such as a recognizable tree the children pass by every day on their way outside.
- Make others less easy to match, such as a close-up shot of a blade of grass.

Magnifying Glass or Microscope Viewing

- Set up a microscope viewing area outdoors on a picnic table or within a play place.
- With students, view sugar grains, leaves, salt grains, newspaper, algae from a class pond project, sand grains—even dust bunnies collected from around the classroom.

Nature Mobiles

- Need a simple and quick decoration for the classroom.
- Turn student nature collections into insect mobiles. (Or for younger children, simply hang found nature items as a mobile)
- Display around the room from a branch or clothes hanger using yarn or string.
- Have students select an insect from the list below and then research picture books to find as many facts as they can.
- String facts from the mobile.
- The mobile base would consist of a student-drawn picture of the bug.
- Insect mobile ideas include:
 - Ladybugs
 - Flies
 - Grasshoppers
 - Ant
 - Butterflies
 - Bees
 - Beetles
 - Roly-polies
 - Walking sticks
 - Crickets
 - Daddy longlegs

Natural Phenomena

- Write the word phenomena on the board or post it somewhere in full view during circle time.
- Ask children how to pronounce the word.
- Ask them what they think it means
- List and discuss a variety of natural phenomena, such as lightning, hurricanes, volcanoes, tornadoes, and earthquakes.
- What will hold the children's interest here is the novel information about natural occurrences, especially if you present them with visuals and creative activities, such as movement with props. For example, have children twirl like a tornado with colored scarves. Avoid scaring students with abstract issues such as rain-forest destruction or global warming. Instead stay centered on defining what each is.
- For example, here is a simple definition for earthquakes; an earthquake occurs when the ground shifts. Use your hands to demonstrate a back-and-forth motion. Show the children California, a common earthquake spot, on a map.
- The phenomena words will build a richer vocabulary.
- Amazing slideshows are available online for children to explore the wonders of the natural world.
- Book resources are available as well, such as Magic School Bus inside a Hurricane by Joanna Cole.

Nature Collections

- A nature collection can trigger curiosity, strengthen vocabulary, and signal environmental awareness for children.
- Collections of nature can awaken the senses in a variety of ways.
- For example, have students collect colorful fall leaves, wet leaves, spring leaves—even tree bud—to observe, organize, label,, compare, and contrast their feel, smell, and wonder!
- Display nature collections with creative mounting.
- Ice cube trays make great sorting trays.
- Nature collection possibilities include rock, twig, shell, butterfly, leaf, insect, wood, and seed.
- Seed collections can be extended to pods, cones, and parachutes, which are also know as helicopters.

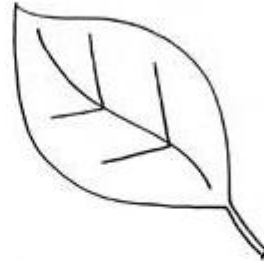
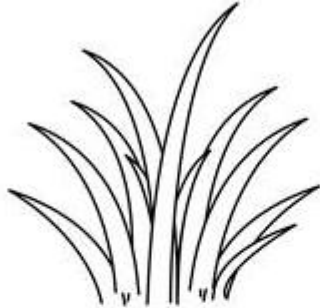
Bug Bingo

- Turn lotto games into bug, or insect, bingo.
- Visit www.discoverthis.com for bingo cards that provide basic “bugology” facts. Make your own cards with interesting and simple insect tidbits written on the front.
- Here are four to give you ideas:
- Insects have a three-part body—the head, thorax, and abdomen
- Insects hatch from eggs
- Insects have six legs. (Spiders have eight.)
- Insects have compound eyes

Bird Feeders

- A bird feeding station can be a welcoming addition to any outdoor play area.
- Let children use their imagination to make a bird feeder out of a gourd, pinecone, craft sticks, or a clean empty mild jug.
- A bagel smeared in peanut butter (as always be aware of allergies), rolled in birdseed, and hung from a tree is as simple bird feeder.
- Guide student bird-feeder ideas. Make specialty feeders for hummingbirds or woodpeckers.
- Have students research and log birds' special feeding needs in their nature journals.
- A hands-on bird feeder project can be delightful to children, especially if they are able to make goopy bird pudding to place inside or smother around their creation.
- Place homemade bird feeders near classroom windows and observe local bird species up close
- Have students chart the most frequent flyers, as well as study their behavior while feeding.

Nature Bingo



Bug Hunting Kits

Bug Hunting Kits

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- Aquarium nets
- Tweezers
- Baby food jars
- Jewelry boxes
- Small note pads and pencils