

Connecting Kids with Nature

Here are some ideas of things to do to get your students paying closer attention to the natural world around them.

Sound Maps

Have kids sit quietly and listen. As they listen, have them record what they hear from a full 360 degrees around themselves on a blank sheet of paper. They should put themselves at the center and record both the sound and direction of the sound on their map. It doesn't matter if they can't identify a particular type of bird or other sound. What matters is listening for and recording sounds from all directions.

Color Search

Give each student a paint color sample card and have the students try to find that *exact shade* outside in the place you're exploring. If it's possible to do without causing much harm, have the students collect a small sample of what they found that matches the color. Then have the students arrange their color cards with the sample material in your own Natural Color Gallery. Marvel at the range of shades and colors they found!

Alternative: give students small artist palettes to which you've stuck some sample colors. Have them work individually or in pairs to find those colors.

Texture Trays

Attach different texture words to the bottom of individual sections of an ice cube tray. Then give each pair of students one of the ice cube trays and have them find examples of something in nature that matches each of the sections. (Egg cartons also work!)

Alternative: Create ice cube trays that are pairs of descriptive words and have students work in pairs to find as many examples of each of the words. (They can line one side with examples of one word and the other side with examples of the other word.) For example, one pair of students might have "curly" and "straight." Another might have "prickly" and "tickly." Then have them share their collections and see if other students can guess the words they had.

Microhike

Give each student a length of string about 18 inches long and challenge them to use the string to trace out an interesting "hike" along the ground. They should lay the string along the ground so that it winds its way past interesting things to see.



Afterward have them share their microhike with a classmate.

Alternative: create mini flags using toothpicks and pieces of construction paper. Give each student a set of 5 or 6 flags. (Students might also make their own flags.) Then have the students plant their flags at interesting things along a 1- to 2-foot mini-hike.

Treasure Hunt

Create disc-shaped "Treasure Detectors" out of card stock or cardboard and laminate them for durability. Have students toss the detectors randomly in the forest or other natural area. Then check out what's found underneath the detector where it landed. What "treasures" do they find?

Nature Bingo

Create your own nature bingo cards for kids to use to explore a natural area. You can put just words on the different squares or include simple line drawings or clipart. Be sure to include things they can feel, smell, or hear as well as items they can see. You can create different bingo cards for different times of year, too.

For more ideas check out *Sharing Nature with Children* by Joseph Cornell.

