

# Nature Walks

Nature walks are fun for children and teachers. More than that, they give you many chances for teaching experiences! You can teach about nature in your neighbourhood, of course, but then add increasing interesting vocabulary, writing with purpose, math, science and much more.

This small booklet will give you ideas for making your nature walks more interesting and fun, as well as super learning experiences.



## Where should we walk?

If you have wilderness near your school, this makes a perfect walk through nature. Not all teachers are this lucky, however. In the city, perhaps there is a park nearby where there are spots of wilderness, A vacant lot will do in a pinch if you have checked carefully to make sure it is safe. It is best if the area has paths and you can make a circular walk—but make do with what you have. Even lawn on the school yard has possibilities.

## Before you go:

Have a plan! There are oodles of ideas in this booklet, or make your own. What is the goal of the walk? How will the children benefit? What directed learning will you do? What may the children learn on their own? Are there pre-walk discussions and learning? What post walk activities might you do?

It helps to do the walk on your own first so you know the interesting places to stop.

## What should the teacher take in a small backpack? Perhaps....

- water
- small snacks for the group
- a class set of plastic zip-lock bags for collections
- band-aids—small first aid kit
- paper towel and tissues
- phone / digital camera for photography, a phone for safety
- tape measure
- a whistle
- depending on the weather, sunscreen, insect repellent, sweater, umbrella, etc.

And.....

- one or more classroom aides or parents if you plan to be out of sight of the school. The teacher should lead so he/she can stop to observe and gather the group for discussion. The aide needs to be at the back of the group to make sure all children are keeping up. The students should be able to see an adult at all times—and vice-versa.

## What might the children take in small backpacks?

- water
- small snacks /lunch
- plastic zip-lock bags for collections—and/or plastic jar with screw-on lid
- magnifying glass
- an old digital camera or phone (that takes photos but has no value) to photograph the findings
- Depending on the weather, a jacket, a small umbrella, a hat.



## What should the leader know before the nature walk?

1. Recognize the main wild trees on your walk. You should be able to name them, and talk about the leaves or needles, the cones or flowers and the bark. Have a look at [leafsnap.com](http://leafsnap.com)!

The following book is perfect for BC teachers to learn to recognize the different trees and good for older student research.

<https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfd/library/documents/treebook/treebook.pdf>

In Alberta: Google— "Guide to the common native trees and shrubs of Alberta". Every province has guides, and many areas do as well.

2, Bushes are a bit more difficult! There are some important ones in different areas, like the wonderful oceanspray on the coast, and the saskatoon berry bush in BC, the prairies and parts of the Yukon. Research several important ones in your area,

3. Wildflowers grow in every area. Know or learn all (or the important ones) that bloom along your walks in the spring.

4. Birds are lovely to watch for. Photograph or show pictures of the common ones and research ones that you and your students see. Post the pictures so your students become familiar.

5, Insects and spiders are interesting, and you will likely teach these in the late spring. Be able to name and discuss the different types and common ones. Watch for butterflies.

6. Water creatures—if you live near the sea, there are many to be found. In inland lakes and rivers and ponds many small fish and other creatures can be studied.

7. Land creatures from deer and moose to mice and small snakes.

P.S.— It is not really possible to be an authority on all of this! It is fine to say "I don't know", and then research for an answer later. The students in later primary will be interested in the research process, and when you bring up pictures on the computer as you google they can help you decide the names. This will inspire children to do their own research.

If you have Grade 3 and up you might try this app— <https://www.inaturalist.org/>

## Have a Purpose for the Walk

1. Make a nature collection. Interesting twigs, leaves, cones, rocks, moss, seeds, flowers, etc. can be collected in plastic bags/jars and carefully observed on site or when back at the school.
2. Have walks as part of the 4 main senses lessons. (Taste is not part of the forest walk.)
3. A scavenger hunt is fun! Have 4 to 10 things for the students to collect, put in their collection bags, and check off on a list.... or simply find. Possibilities—bring back a smooth rock, a leaf with more than three points, a cone, moss, a flower; and find a spider web, a butterfly, an ant, a tree with needles, etc.
4. Seed or leaf collection—more on these in the seasonal section.
5. Collect things that the student thinks are artistic—sticks, grass, leaves, stones. bark, etc.
6. Pond collection. Have dip nets so the students can collect small items from a pond.
7. Learn the names of plants and animals seen on the walk. Gain an understanding of the ecology of the area. Why do these plants or animals thrive in this environment.
8. Go out to learn vocabulary and math—more about that later....
9. Adopt a tree—more later.....
10. Gather seed heads and colourful leaves to make a bouquet.
11. Build a rock tower or try to make a inukshuk.
12. Gather attractive sticks or foliage to make a picture.
13. Have a picnic.
14. Find different types of spider webs.
15. Find mushrooms (don't touch!).
16. Match tree leaves or needles, bark, and cones or flowers/berries.
17. Ocean beaches have many things to collect!  
There will be lots more ideas suitable to your area.
18. Talk about the seasonal changes you see in your environment.



<https://premeditatedleftovers.com/naturally-frugal-mom/100-things-to-look-for-on-a-nature-walk/>  
And a great site for ideas: <https://jimmiescollage.com/100-nature-walk/>

# Autumn Nature Walks

First, learn about your nature trail. Know the names of the evergreen trees, the way the needles have formed on the little branches, and if pines, know how many needles in a bunch.

Learn the deciduous trees, the shape and size of the leaves and if they have berries or other seeds in autumn.

Be able to match the bark to the name of the tree so when the leaves have gone it can still be identified..

## Seeds

Have a lesson on how seeds travel. On the walk, make a seed collection in a baggie. Try to find burrs or other prickly seeds, seeds with wings, seeds that pop, etc.

In a meadow, drag a fuzzy blanket or fabric behind you to see what sticks to it.

Find seeds that will float in water. How does that help them to travel?

Find different kinds of seeds that fly.

Think about how wild animals help seeds to travel.

Different grasses have different tassels. How do these help seeds move?

Bring in fruit and discuss seeds. How does the fruit part help seeds travel?

Find different seeds on trees— cones, wings, berries, etc. Take a cone apart.

On the coast, learn about ferns and the spores that grow new plants.

See "Art Through the Year".....

Collect grasses and other seeds on stems to make a bouquet.

Look at a sunflower, bake seeds, make a sunflower in art lesson.



## Leaves in the Autumn

Learn why leaves turn colour in the Autumn.

<https://www.esf.edu/pubprog/brochure/leaves/leaves.htm>

Collect coloured fallen leaves from the different trees. Match the leaf to the tree.

Collect leaves for art projects - see "Art Through the Year"

Collect leaves of different shapes. Collect leaves with different numbers of points, Are they all odd numbers? Why?

## Make an Autumn Sensory Bag

Some things are lovely to touch! Smooth stones that fit in your palm, chestnuts (nuts of different kinds), small pieces of driftwood, bark, seeds, some cones and many things the children will find on their Autumn walks are great to hold in the hands. Have each child build their own. (In the time of covid-19, sharing a sensory bin isn't suitable.....) Having a special stone to hold can be very helpful for children with some disabilities or are unable to sit still.

## **Adopt a Tree!**

After a few walks on a familiar wilderness path, ask each child to adopt a special tree! Take a picture in each season. Name the species, and know the needles or leaves. How do you know it is alive? Is your tree home to birds, animals or insects? What is the bark like? What changes are there through the year? Measure the trunk. How tall do you think it is? Take a bark rubbing, and take a sample of the leaves or needles. Keep going back to the trees and discuss the changes.

## **An Autumn Scavenger Hunt**

Go on the nature walk by yourself and write down things your students might collect on a scavenger hunt. Write a list of these with check boxes after them. As the students walk, they see how many of the items they can find and check them off the list—or collect them in a plastic jar, baggie or paper bag. Living creatures can be on the list but not collected, such as a bird, snake, insect, mouse, etc.

## **Make a 'perfect leaf' collage**

Collect fallen coloured leaves that are perfect, and in a variety of colours and shapes. When back in the classroom press them between wax paper sheets and place books on top so they will be flat. Then the next day give the students a large sheet of white paper and they glue the leaves on in an attractive pattern. To keep them for a longer time, cover with clear plastic adhesive sheets.

## **Begin a Nature Notebook**

After the first walk of the year, have the students begin to write a nature notebook. Put the date and weather at the top, including the temperature and cloud cover. Have the students write about where you went, and if you saw animals, birds, small animals, and insects. Write about what you learned and what you enjoyed.



# Winter Nature Walks

## Season Changes

Follow the changes on your favourite nature walk. Notice the differences between ever-green and deciduous trees in winter and notice the plants that have died in the frost. The seeds like the ones you collected in the autumn will grow new plants in the spring.

What do the animals in your area do in the winter? Discuss heavier fur and sometimes changing colour. Talk about hibernation and migration.

Put up bird feeding stations away from the school yard. There are different birds in winter coming to the stations.

## Snow

Where will it be warmer - on top of the snow or under the snow? Use a thermometer to find out. After discovery, how could this knowledge help someone? Help animals in winter?



## Snow Experiments:

Take an old clear plastic pop bottle and cut off the top half. Mark the outside in centimeters with a permanent laundry marker and place it outside in a place where it can collect the falling snow. Measure how much melted snow it takes to make water.

Catch Some Snowflakes - Put black velvet or black construction papers in the freezer or outside to chill. When it is snowing, take them out and go outside and let some snowflakes land on the dark surface. Quickly, before they melt, examine the flakes with a magnifying glass. Many snowflakes are 'broken' and so you don't see the whole six sided crystal, but with persistence you'll see some beautiful examples.

## A Nature Walk in the Snow

Look beside the path to see if animals or birds have been here first! From the tracks can the students tell which ones? If the snow isn't too deep, can you track the animal? Research the different animal tracks.

Give the tree you adapted a hug. Can you see winter changes in the tree?

In the winter you can see bird nests that were built in deciduous trees.

It is nice to be absolutely still on a winter day, Be still and look, listen and feel. How is it different from other seasons?

Collect cones for Christmas decorations. Compare and contrast them. Find the seeds in each.

Touch the different needles on conifer trees. Use good vocabulary to describe how they are different.

## More Winter Activity

Find a quiet spot to sit in a group. Play gentle classical music softly and listen with eyes closed. For ideas, go here.

<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/mood/relaxing/music-relaxation/>

Photography— Ask your group to find something interesting or beautiful. When a student has found something, have him/her explain it to you and then photograph it. Enlarged and printed these make a wonderful display, even in black and white.

Do an outdoor art project on a snowy day. Each student can get four straight sticks to make the outline of the picture, and then collect interesting things to put in a picture.

Sounds seem to travel differently on a quiet snowy day. What sounds did your group notice? What nature sounds did you hear?

Learn the tracks of local animals and birds.

Make edible sculptures for the birds to hang on trees or bushes. *G* here for a good idea,,, <https://cwf-fcf.org/en/explore/below-zero/activities.html>

Not a nature theme, but from my long ago childhood. Play 'Pie' on a day with new snow. On a clear flat space with no tracks, stamp out a large circle and then stamp across it several times as you would cut a pie. Play tag, but only run on the paths. The center can be a 'safe' space.

For exercise, make a winter path by stomping down the snow with boots —lift the knees with each step and stomp! It's a good workout.....

Build a snowman or other sculptures. Photograph them! Snow forts are fun for the students to make if your snow is suitable. Use very cold water in a fine spray to keep sculptures longer.

Make snow angels and photograph. These are fun on a bulletin board.

Sing outdoors in a group!



# Spring Nature Walks

## Season Changes

Early spring in your area is a lovely time for nature walks. Talk about the wonderful changes happening with the trees and plants, the birds and animals..

Dress appropriately for the weather and ground conditions. Boots are necessary for mud! The way you dress is one of the season changes.

Talk about the 4 senses that you see around you. (we don't want children tasting things outdoors). What do we see, hear, smell and feel in the spring? For older children they can make a journal of these four, and for the early grades make charts of these.

Walk slowly so the children have time to see the changes by your path. Sit down if it is dry or if you bring plastic or other waterproof material to sit on. The senses will show different things if you are very quiet, look closely perhaps with a magnifying glass, smell the things around you and feel the new grass and leaves. Magnifying glasses help the children to see things in the soil as well.

If your students have adopted a tree, notice the differences and give your tree a spring hug — unless the sap is running!. Are there birds in your tree or insects on it? Notice new leaf buds and ones just opening, or the way new needles grow on evergreen trees.

## A Photography Walk

As mentioned before, if your students can find an old cell phone or digital camera with no value, this is a super way that children can observe nature and record it. It will bring out the artistic eye in many kids, and they can share what they see. Back in the classroom you can print out pictures that are special or make a computer file for each student where they can save their pictures. This can be a directed walk for a purpose (insects, for example). If your students have had some practice taking pictures—here are some ideas:

<http://goexplorenature.com/2014/03/2014-spring-nature-photo-hunt.html>

## A Colour Walk

On a clear sunny spring day, a colour walk is lovely! This is a way to also extend the students' vocabulary —perhaps use some of these. <https://www.writerswrite.co.za/204-words-that-describe-colours/>

Print out a shades of green chart (for example), and see what the exact colour of a leaf or evergreen needles is by matching to the chart.

<https://justjeslyn.com/2020/06/23/names-for-colors/>  
(With this site you can click on the image you want, save it and just print that.)

Talk about the colours of the rainbow, and see if you can find something of each colour.





## Spring Scavenger Hunts

Make a list of suitable spring items in your area. It could be on trees, bushes, grass, flowers, insects, birds, etc. The students check the item off on a list when they find it, rather than collection and disturbing nature. For younger students, the list can be pictures. The following website has a list if you scroll down with oodles of ideas.

<https://livingmontessorinow.com/n-is-for-nature-walks-with-free-printables/>

## Dip Netting

Ponds, streams and swamps have lots of life in the spring. You can buy aquarium nets for about \$3 on Amazon—the mesh may be a bit too large, but they are fun for children to dip into the water. The "Celsius Floating Minnow Bucket Dip Net: on Amazon is \$5 and is bigger. The teacher can bring a bucket and put an inch or two of water where the children can put anything they find in the nets. (Gum boots are a must.)

## Preserving Wildflowers

There are different ways to preserve wildflowers. It is great to have your students know the names of the flowers in your area, and a preserved record is fun for your students.

<https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/kids/activities/preservewildflowers.shtml>

I have used wax paper sheets with the flower between and pressed it under books for a few days—then put the waxed paper sheets with the flower under soft cloth and iron it at a low temperature. To show off the flowers, remove them from the wax paper and place between clear plastic adhesive sheets. (Clear plastic adhesive on a roll is very useful for lots of things—you can find it on Amazon...)

## Know Your Local Birds

Have a bulletin board with pictures and names of the common local birds, from the hummingbird to Canada geese. If you teach these and watch for birds in the spring, the students will be very happy to recognize them on your walks! Of course, the robin will likely be first. If you see other birds on your walks, teach the students to watch for the size, colouring, and features and then research them.

If you found any deserted nests in the winter, these are interesting for the students to explore on your science table.. How are they held together? What materials did the birds use? Why? (If you have a deserted nest in your classroom, spray it thoroughly with disinfectant before the children handle it.) Make a nest!

<https://kidscraftroom.com/make-a-birds-nest-steam-project/>



# Learning on Nature Walks

## Language Skills

Learn new, interesting and precise vocabulary to explain what they see, hear, touch and smell. Below are some words that could be used on nature walks. You could make a chart of appropriate words and add to it as the students find more. Then in class have them describe nature items using appropriate words.

### Words for sounds:

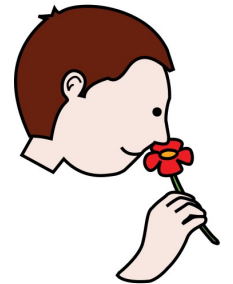
bang, bark, beep, bellow, blare, blast, bleat, bong, boom, bray, buzz, cackle, cheep, chime, clack, clank, clap, clatter, clink, cluck, clunk, crack, crackle, crash, creak, dingdong, drop, drumming, fizz, glug, gnashing, gobble, grating, growl, grumble, gurgle, hiss, hoot, howl, hum, jingle, jangle, kachink, knock, mew, moan, mod, murmur, neigh, patter, peal, peep, pop, power, pounding, pulsing, purr, put-put, rap, rat-a-tat, rattle, ring, rippling, roar, rumble, rushing, rustle, scream, scrunch, shriek, sizzle, slam, snap, snarl, snort, splash, sputter, squawk, squeal, squish, stamp, swish, swoosh, tap, tattoo, tearing, throb, thud, thump, thunder, tick, tick-tock, tinkle, toot, trill, twang, twitter, wail, wheeze, whine, whir, whisper, yap, yelp, zap

### Words for touch:

bristly brush bumpy caress chill chilly coarse cold coldness contact cool crawly creepy crisp cuddly dab damp deadened downy dull dry dusty feathery feel feeling feverish firm flabby flat fluffy flush flushed fondle fumble furry fuzzy gooey grab grasp grainy greasy gritty gummy hairy hard heavy hot humid itch juicy jumpy lifeless light limp lukewarm lumpy massage maul moist numb oily pat peck pet pinch powdery prickly pull push rough rub sandy scratch scratchy sharp shiver shudder shuddering shuddery shove silky slap slick slimy slippery smooth soft solid spongy springy squashy squeeze stiff sting stinging stretchy strike stroke sweaty tag tap temperature tepid texture thorny tickle ticklish tingle touch tough toughened uneven velvety vibrate vibrating warm warmth wet woolly

### Words for smell:

Words for smell usually are about something we know—lemony, cedar, plastic, rose, doggy, moldy..... More: Wispy, rancid, airy, musty, stale, fresh, putrid, faint, light, floral, acrid, fragrant, pungent, savory, spicy, sweet, heady, flowery, rotten, skunky



## Sentences

For part of a walk, only speak in sentences! Praise good sentences, especially with interesting words, and make a special sound for non-sentence

## Lost in the Woods

I taught this program to my class maybe 40 years ago! It is easy for a child to walk away from the parents or a group and then become lost. The children really got into this program and there was a lot of good information. It came from Colleen Politano in Victoria, BC. In my day there was a kit and I believe there were videos, and my kids acted out a lot of the situations and the Grade 2s made booklets to take home. There were simple ideas, such as staying put, keeping warm and attracting attention. This website is all I can find about it online.

<https://www.sarbc.org/lost-in-the-woods>

## Take the Temperature

Learn how to read a thermometer, and then keep a daily chart of the readings, This can be turned into a graph as well.

Is the temperature the same in different places on your nature walk? Read the one by the school and the one deep in the woods.

## Counting

Collect seeds or nuts, and then count them in 10s, of course. How many do 3 people have together, or 10 people? How do you know you are right?

Use these seeds or nuts to find answers to addition, subtraction or multiplication and division questions.

## Measurement

Provide each student with an inexpensive dollar store measuring tape that can go in their small backpack on nature walks. Measure the circumference of your adopted tree. Measure the height of small trees in the fall and see how much they grow in the spring.

Measure the height of a new plant in the spring and then measure it each week to see how much it has grown. (Mark the plant with a tag that can be put into the ground beside it.

For older students, measure the length of an average stride. How should that be done? Then count steps to a stated point and figure out how to find the length of this walk.

## Shapes

Are there shapes in nature? See how many circles the students can find - the center of a flower, the diameter and rings of a tree, the seeds in a sunflower and a hole in the earth made by an ant. Can the students brainstorm to think of rectangles or triangles in nature? What about a bee hive or wasp nest? Seeds can be perfect sphere.

Watch for numbers and patterns. A starfish can have five arms, a snowflake with six points, flower petals, the shape of ferns, frost on a windowpane, spirals on a snail shell — there are so many to watch for!



## Time

Time your nature walks. Were you slower or faster today? Why? How many minutes difference?

Think of longer periods of time! How long does it take for a flower to become a seed? A leaf to fall from the tree?

## **This is your place!**

Send in details of your walk! Have you had special experiences? Do you have favourite lessons about your walk? What do your children like to do? Send to [primarysuccess@shaw.ca](mailto:primarysuccess@shaw.ca)