



NATURE AWARENESS ACTIVITIES



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INTRODUCTION

Do you have some extra time on your hands? Are your girls getting bored or wild in the cabin? Why not let them enjoy the natural environment around them? By increasing their awareness of the natural world, they will come to appreciate it more and hopefully help to preserve it.

This booklet is designed to provide outdoor activities that require little or no equipment. They include hiking, sensory perception and awareness activities. There is also a section on group cooperation skills.

If we, as adults, foster an appreciation and excitement for nature in ourselves and show concern for our environment, the girls we guide will also adopt these characteristics.



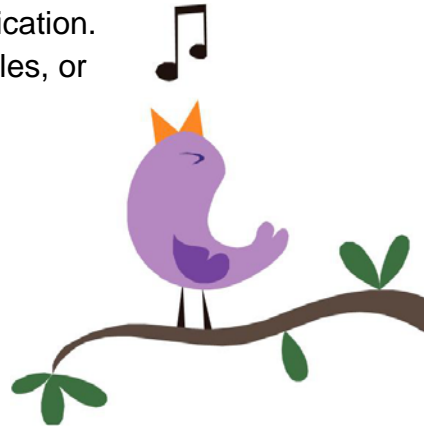
NATURE AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

The following activities will increase the girls' sensory perception. Our sense of sight is so great that it hinders us from using other senses. In these activities, our other senses—that of hearing, touching and smelling—are brought into focus.

- 1. Trust Walk** – Have the girls select a partner. One member of the pair is blindfolded and the other will be her guide. The guide must seek interesting sensory sensations (smell, sound and touch sensations). There should be little verbal communication. She should have her partner feel things like moss, pine needles, or rough bark and smell things like flowers. She can have her partner feel the sun on her face and then lead her to a shaded spot. Listening activities can include hearing birds chirping, grasses rustling, or water moving in a stream.

NOTE: Encourage safe behavior during this activity by assuring each guide that the roles will be reversed and they will have to rely on their partner to keep them safe.

Allow each session to last approximately ten to fifteen minutes.



- 2. Hug-A-Tree** – Have the girls select a partner. One member of the pair is blindfolded and the other will be her guide. The blindfolded partner is spun around to disorient her. (Omit this for younger girls). The guide takes the blindfolded partner carefully to a tree in the vicinity nearby. The blindfolded person takes her time to first hug the tree to get an idea of its size. She then should feel the bark and describe its texture. She should feel the roots to see if they go directly into the ground or stay above. She should feel if there is anything growing on or near the tree.

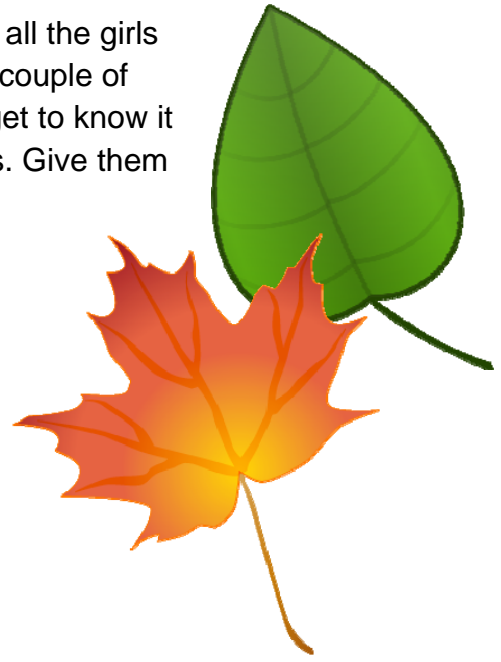


When she thinks she knows her tree, the guide will take her back to the starting point, where she may remove her blindfold. She must now find her tree. Her guide should follow her and let her know if she is correct. When her tree is found, the leader should ask her how she knew that was her tree.

Then the partners switch roles and repeat the process.

3. **One-of-a-Kind Leaf** – Have each girl find a leaf. Then all the girls should stand in a circle holding their leaf. Give them a couple of minutes to quietly get to know their leaf. They should get to know it so well that they will be able to find it in a pile of leaves. Give them thirty seconds to a minute to do this.

Have them place their leaf in a pile in the middle of the circle. Add ten or so additional leaves to the pile. Have three or four girls at a time retrieve their leaf from the pile. When everyone has found their leaf, have them, one at a time, say how they knew they had their own leaf. You can explain that leaves, like people, may have some similarities, but are still all different from one another. It is those differences that make us special!



4. **Animals Sounds** – Each girl is blindfolded and secretly given the name of an animal. By imitating the sound of the animal, the girls must line up from smallest to largest animal in size.
5. **Touch Analogies** – While hiking, collect items like bark, moss, nuts, leaves, twigs, feathers, etc. Place one of the objects in a box or scarf. Have the girls feel the object one at a time. (They can be blindfolded for this activity). Have them record what they think is in the box or scarf. Show them the object to see if they were correct.
6. **Animal Partner Sounds** – Have the girls select a partner. Between themselves, each pair decides what animal sound they will both make. Have the girls form two parallel lines. One girl from each pair should stand in each line across from her partner. The lines should be approximately twenty feet apart. (The older the girls, the further apart the lines can be).



When the signal is given, all the girls close their eyes and begin walking toward their partners making their animal sound. They are also listening for their partner's sound. When they find each other, they may open their eyes and wait for the other girls to finish.

WHEEL EXPLORATION

Do you have some free time with nothing to do? Have everyone lie on their backs in a circle in a field, heads to the center. Everyone should be touching. Activities in this position can include cloud watching (observing the shapes they form), watching leaves fall, bird watching, etc. This can also be used as a quiet time for simple observation of sounds. Everyone should be quiet for a minute and count how many different sounds they hear.

Having the girls lie on their stomachs for another type of wheel exploration. This can be used for observing details or having a sharing circle after a hike.



MINI TRAILS

Give each girl a piece of string. Three feet is the average length for a 6th grader. The younger the girl, the longer the string should be. Each girl is also given small pieces of paper, a pencil, and toothpicks.

Have the girls choose a small area for their mini trail. Have the girls lay the string out to form a trail. Tell them not to step on it but to straddle it instead and walk very slowly, making observations along the way. They should mark interesting areas or objects by writing each one on a small piece of paper, sticking a toothpick through the paper and inserting the toothpick into the ground.

Hand lenses, if available, would help them spot small insects or seeds. Give the girls approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete their trail.

When all the trails are completed, have half of the girls stay at their trails to be tour guides to the others. Optional: you can give the girls candy pieces, small cookies, nuts or pebbles to give to the tour guides as admission!

Have the girls switch roles so they all get a chance to be tour guides for their mini trail. They will be amazed at what lies just below their feet!

RUBBINGS

If you did not bring a camera with you, have no fear! All you need to take a picture of a leaf or bark is a crayon and a piece of paper.

1. **Leaf Rubbings** – Have the girls find the bottom of the leaf by touching and looking. The coloration is usually lighter and the veins are more apparent on the bottom.

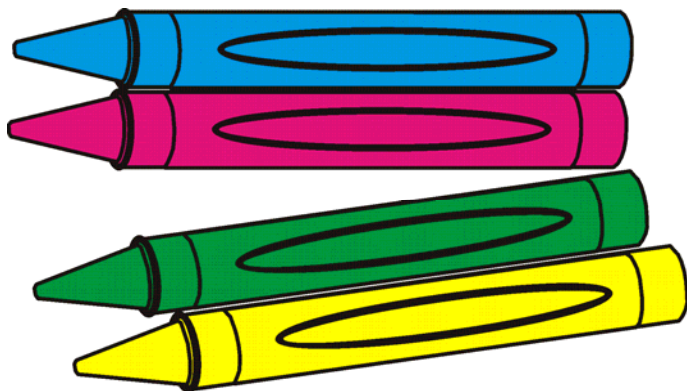
Have the girls place the leaf, bottom side up, on a hard surface. They then put the paper on top of the leaf and, holding the paper firmly, use their crayon to draw back and forth over the leaf. The girls should rub to the very edges of the leaf allowing the shape to come through onto the paper.

NOTE: Girls can make sponge leaf prints using a small amount of tempera paint on a sponge. To do this, they simply dab around the edges of a leaf that is laying on a piece of paper. The outline of the leaf will be left behind when they lift it off the paper. Ferns work really well too.



This activity can be done on paper and envelopes to create nice stationery.

2. **Bark Rubbings** – Have the girls lay the paper against a tree and rub the paper with a crayon. They might want to try different places on the tree trunk to see variations in the bark. Have them compare their rubbings to someone else's with the same kind of tree. Do they look similar?



ECOLOGY HUNT

Put the girls into groups of four to five. Hand each group a bag to collect objects. Each group should also receive a piece of paper with the following list written on the front:

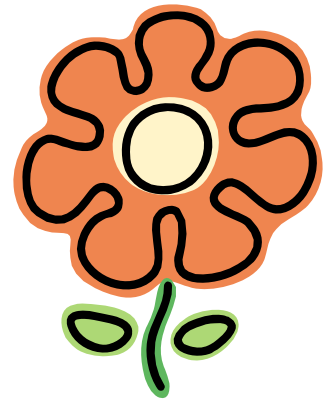
- A leaf with pointy edges
- A leaf with worm or insect holes
- A shiny rock
- A rock shaped like a
- A feather
- A nut that has been cracked open
- A piece of decayed (rotten) wood
- A piece of litter

And, this list written on the back:

- Worm
- Squirrel
- Bird
- Moss
- Art
- Flower
- Fern
- Evergreen tree
- Animal track
- Spider web

Girls should collect items from the list on the front and put them into their bag. Girls should find items from the list on the back, but only check these items off as they observe them. Remind the girls that this second list of items contains things that are alive and are not to be disturbed. The girls would not like it if someone disturbed their home or took them away from their family.

Give the girls boundary lines and remind them they must stay together as a group. Make sure each group has a watch and is given a time limit. An adult should accompany groups of younger girls.



HIKING ACTIVITIES

Exploring animal homes and searching for evidence of animal activity are best done through an exploratory hike. There are many activities that can be done while on the hike to keep it interesting. Some ideas are listed below.

Keep your walk to a two-hour time limit. (Or, one hour for younger girls). Each activity should be done in a different spot along the trail. Try to plan each activity spot ahead of time, if possible.

Don't be concerned that you do not have a degree in environmental science. Children are naturally curious and the girls will find lots of objects to explore along the way. Ask them who they think made that hole, and why the fallen tree is crumbling apart, and who left the nuts all chewed apart near the tree. Questions like this will spark their participation and imagination.



Enjoy your Hike!

- 1. Passing it Back** – When something interesting is found along the way, a good way to share it with everyone else is to pass it to the person behind you. That person then passes it back and so on until everyone has viewed the object.
- 2. Pebble Cribbage** – Each person picks up ten small stones, which she carries in her hand or pocket. As the group hikes, the leader points out natural objects. Without answering out loud, each girl tries to answer a question given by the leader. When the leader reveals the answer, all those who correctly answered the question may drop a stone. The one who has dropped all of her stones first is the winner! All participants must agree to play honestly.
- 3. Stop & Listen** – At some point along the way, tell everyone to “freeze,” close their eyes and listen to all the different sound around them. Give them one minute. They may all open their eyes and tell you what sound they heard.

4. **Color Hike** – Before you leave for your hike, give each girl a crayon of one of the primary colors. As they hike, have them collect items they see that are that color. Tell them to collect an object only if it is dead, on the ground, or not disrupting an animal's home.



When you complete the hike, gather together in a circle and let each girl share one or two objects they saw that matched their color. NOTE: If no crayons are available, just verbally give each girl a color to look for.

Shapes can be substituted for colors.

5. **A, B, C Hike** – Before the hike, hand each girl an index card with a consonant on it from the alphabet. Tell them to find objects on their hike that begin with that letter. After the hike, have the girls share their findings. NOTE: Give each girl a letter to remember if index cards or paper and pen are not available.

6. **Detective Hike** – Have the girls pretend they are detectives. As you walk down the trail, have them find an interesting object, such as a stump where a squirrel had been feeding, a hole made by a woodpecker, etc. Let them examine the evidence and then reconstruct the 'scene of the crime.'

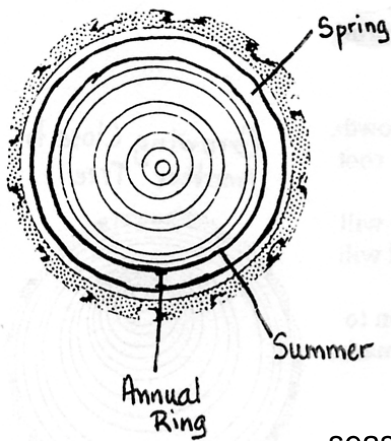
7. **Memory Game** – As the girls hike, encourage them to pick up interesting from the ground to share with the others when you return. Always stress not to remove live critters from their home or to strip leaves or branches from live trees or bushes.



When you return, lay nine to twelve objects on the ground and ask the girls to take thirty seconds to memorize what's there. Cover the objects with a scarf, sheet or towel. Remove one object without anyone seeing which one and then remove the sheet. Have the girls figure out which object has been removed.

To play again, return all objects to their places. You can increase the number of objects you remove to make it more difficult. The girls will play this game with greater accuracy than the adults!

8. Counting Rings on a Stump – The rings of a tree stump can tell you a lot about the tree’s history. Not only do the rings tell you how old the tree was, they also show what the climate conditions were like in years past.



Each ring on the tree is a layer of wood produced during the tree’s growing season. There is a light colored band followed by a darker band. The lighter band is the spring growth, which is usually a wide band due to the rapid growth during the season. The darker, narrower band is the slower summer growth. Together the two bands form one annual ring.

To estimate the approximate age of the tree, have the girls count the annual rings. To identify the climate and the tree’s growth history, take a closer look. During a good growing season, a wide ring is laid down. But during a poor growing season (i.e. drought, a long cold winter, a spring frost, etc.) the ring will be much narrower.

Other factors can also influence the tree’s growth, such as insect damage, disease, fire, root damage, competition with other trees, construction, etc. Any kind of stress will be indicated in the rings.

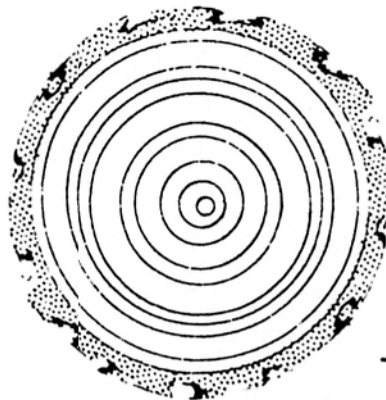


FIRE

These illustrations will help you and the girls to identify some of these influences on a tree stump you discover on your hike.



Growing Close to Another Tree



Narrow Rings - Drought or Insect Infestation

GROUP INITIATIVES

Group Initiatives are problem-solving situations that are designed to stimulate participation in a group activity. In each situation, girls are confronted with a physical problem that they must solve cooperatively. They must then carry out their plan of action as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Through these experiences, the girls will become aware of group cooperation, decision-making and trusting others. These three concepts should be discussed briefly with the group, making them aware that they will only succeed if these concepts are applied.

Throughout the exercises, emphasis should be placed on safety. Before each one, present the problem with an allotted amount of time to solve it. These activities are geared toward girls about ten year and older.

1. **Birthday Line** – The girls must arrange themselves in a line according to the month and date of birth without talking.
2. **Blindfold Height Line** – The girls must arrange themselves in a line according to height while blindfolded and without talking.
3. **Human Chain** (for older girls) – The group forms a circle and each girl places her right in the center and takes the hand of the person opposite her. Then, each girl extends her left hand and takes the hand of someone other than the person whose right hand she is holding.

If there is an even number of girls, one pair of hand is then separated. (This does not need to be done if there is an odd number of participants). They must untangle themselves without breaking hold of each other's hands until they form a straight line.

4. **Team on a T-Shirt** – Stretch a T-shirt or towel out flat on the ground. Have the girls arrange themselves on the T-shirt or towel so that no one's feet touches the ground around the fabric. The position must be held for ten seconds.

NOTE: This can also be done on a low tree stump.

5. **Ten-Legged Walker** – Have the girls line up shoulder to shoulder. Connect their legs to the person on both sides of them with string, scarves, or shirts, tied at the ankles. They must walk as a single unit in response to your commands (i.e. walk straight ahead, step backwards, move to the right or left, walk around a give object, etc.)