



PARENT EXPRESS

Children in Nature

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Educators and parents can foster an appreciation for and love of nature by inviting children to explore the world around them through hands-on or outdoor experiential learning. By doing so, we hope to inspire youths to become environmentally responsible and spark a lifelong love of learning, nature and the outdoors.

Hands-on exploration in an outdoor setting is so important for children. Children benefit from structured and unstructured opportunities to explore and play in nature.

Literature in Nature

Nature is important to children's development in every major way – intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically. Dr. Stephen R. Kellert of Yale University states, “play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity,

problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual growth.”

Literacy and Nature

- Much of the information points to the importance of developing literacy in the early years of schooling and nurturing that literacy growth throughout the child's school years.
- Literacy can support outdoor science, which fosters literacy through interest.
- Nonfiction books can be used to engage students in true inquiry. In order to encourage and foster reading, writing and thinking skills, students must have **interesting topics** to learn about.
- In order to increase achievement in science, educators and parents must find ways to present information in exciting and interesting ways.

*Write about it,
draw it:*

- Writing helps organize thoughts, and drawing helps focus on and remember detail.



Facilitating Discussion

- **Set the stage.** Take a walk through a wooded area, lay down and look at the sky. Have the child describe what he/she sees. Give the child a 3-foot by 3-foot square of grass to inspect.

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What does he/she notice? The child can either write about the experience or tell the reading partner what he/she saw. Also, a book that talks about some of the items observed can be read.

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Don't dominate or be passive. Facilitate. Listen, don't lecture.
- **Reword and expand vocabulary.** For example, in a story a main character may be identified as a terrapin. Kids may not know what a terrapin is; however, they may know what a turtle is.
- **Summarize.**
- **Reflect.**

Book Nook

Suggested books are:

- *Butterflies in the Garden* – authored and illustrated by Carol Lerner
- *Around the Pond: Who's Been Here?* – authored and illustrated by Lindsay Barrett George
- *In My Backyard* – authored by Valerie Glogas and illustrated by Katherine Zecca
- *Mountain Dance* – authored and illustrated by Thomas Locker
- *Outside Your Window, a First Book of Nature* – authored by Nicola Davis and illustrated by Mark Hearld
- *The Cloud Book* – authored and illustrated by Tomie dePaola

Extended activities help to increase a child's reading levels. Here are suggestions to extend and enhance the reading experience:

Examples are provided for the reading partner with regard to *The Cloud Book*.

- Prepare a snack.
 - Blue gelatin topped with whipped topping
- Complete an art project.
 - Streamer Rainbow:
 1. Cut a paper plate in half.
 2. Glue cotton balls on the plate.

3. Add colorful streamers made from crepe paper or ribbon. Glue them on the straight side of the plate from the back.

- Complete writing exercises.
 - Ask the child to write about a part of the book or retell the book in his/her own words.
 - If the child is older, have him/her write a poem or a song about clouds.
- Play a game.
 - Field Meet
 1. If there is more than one child, divide into two or more even groups. Begin the meet with the first child in line running a specific distance with a cotton ball or marshmallow in a spoon. If the cotton ball or marshmallow falls off the spoon, the child goes back to the starting line and begins again. When the child returns to the starting line, he/she passes the spoon to the next person. Continue until all have participated. If there is only one child, then just record the child's time. An alternative is to have the child blow through a straw in order to move a cotton ball. Proceed as indicated in the above example.
- Sing some music.
 - **The Clouds Are Passing By**
(Sing to the tune of *Farmer in the Dell*)

The clouds are passing by,
The clouds are passing by,
Heigh-ho just watch them go,
The clouds are passing by.

The clouds are passing by
Way up in the sky.
Sometimes fast, sometimes slow,
The clouds are passing by.

– Jean Warren
(www.preschoolexpress.com)

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- Do a dance.

- **CLOUDY**

- (Sing to the tune of BINGO)

- Today the clouds are in the sky

- And cloudy is the weather,

- C L O U D Y

- C L O U D Y

- C L O U D Y

- And cloudy is the weather.

- Have the children form a circle with hands joined. As they sing the first two lines, have them take four steps towards the center (first line) and four steps back (second line). Proceed left spelling the word CLOUDY. Go right the second time, and then go left again for the third spelling of CLOUDY. Drop hands and turn left, clapping hands for four counts.

- Take a nature walk.

- Have children walk outside to explore things in nature: feel the rocks, trees and leaves; listen to the birds; and watch for animals or bugs.

Suggested Reading for Parents

Last Child in the Woods

This national bestseller is the first book to bring together a new and growing body of research indicating that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of children and adults. Louv offers practical solutions and simple ways to heal the broken bond – and many are right in our own backyard.

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