

## Nature Hike

*suggestions for a learning experience filled with wide-eyed wonder*

\* Things you will need. Choose items from this list. If you take all of it, it will be way too much!

- **Audubon bird call**
- **bird posters** (to hand out after hike)
- **journals**
- **10 pine cones, needles, leaves, seeds**, etc. of different species
- **nature stamps** (to decorate the journal)
- **crayons, markers, colored pencils, and sharp lead pencils** (to color and write)
- **butterfly nets**
- **bug magnifying boxes**
- **hand lenses**
- **binoculars**
- **furs**
- **bird nests**
- **scat**
- **tracks**
- **feathers**
- **wasp nest**
- **field guides**
- **blindfolds**

Plan your route ahead of time and decide upon (10?) places where the group will stop for exploration, discovery and discussion. You can plant fur, nests, scat, feathers or beehives anywhere along the hiking trail to ensure that you will have some good finds and something to write about in the journals even if you don't see a moose! Using the animal tracks in dust, snow or mud, you can stage a coyote stalking its prey or a porcupine climbing a tree. Have the kids look for 3 or 4 different plant reproductive parts. These, plus the ones you brought, can be used to talk together about identification, life cycles, seed dispersal, ecology, similarities and differences. Point out wildflowers, smell them, are any being pollinated right in front of your eyes? Point out any berries, roots, or seeds that are important to wildlife for food or shelter. Do you see any holes in snags where a woodpecker found a buggy meal or made its summer shelter? Have kids take turns standing on a stump where the mighty ponderosa pine once stood, where its sap once flowed. Does the stump have fungi growing on it? What are the fungi doing? Does nature recycle nutrients through decomposition? Are fungi the only decomposers? Merge a tree's history with the children's by having them adopt one that is the same age as themselves. How are you and your tree alike? What will your tree be doing when you are 18, 25, 60, 100 years old? Ask the kids if they have a favorite tree back home – a climbing tree, fruit tree or treehouse? During and at the end of the hike, there are many things that need recording in the journals. You can make leaf rubbings with leaves and crayons. Poems can describe feelings and ideas in less space than full sentences. Sketching insects, birds, plants and landscapes is a good visual way to record your impressions. Remember to have fun, and don't worry if you don't make it to all of your stops. Just go with the flow of the kids and what's happening around you. Listen to the kids and share their amazement, delight in their discovery. Above all, you must be flexible. You will pass through sunlight and shadow, wind and calm, riparian, forest, wetland and grassland habitats. You will see a mixture of life and death on even this shortest of journeys. Death allows for new life to spring from the soil, and the natural balance of systems moves forward in a never-ending cycle. These are the thoughts that you want to impress upon the children.