



Sensory Activity 7: Observing Nature Close Up

Primary Goal

Expanding experience of the natural world.

Secondary Goals

Developing sensory skills; developing language; developing practical life skills; developing the ability to observe quietly; developing respect for other living things.

Material

Outside area where there is grass and where the child can sit or lie without harming garden plants. Use a long rope to mark off a small area about 2 feet in diameter.

Child-size magnifying glass.

Clothes and footwear appropriate for outdoors.

Safety note: Stay conscious of the weather. If the sun is shining brightly, there is a chance the magnifying glass can burn the child or the grass. Choose an overcast day or choose to do this activity in the early morning or late afternoon, when the sun is not so hot.

Presentation

- This activity appeals particularly to the interests and abilities of twos 30–36 months old.
- In advance, rope off the area where you want to present the activity.
- Invite the child to go outside and look for interesting things.
- With the child, get the magnifying glass, then put on outdoor clothing.
- Outside, show the child the area you have roped off. Lie down on the grass on your stomach, with your head and arms inside the marked-off area. Invite the child to lie down beside you.



- Hold the magnifying glass just above a blade of grass and move your eye close.
- Observe quietly for a few moments, then pause and smile at the child.
- Offer the magnifying glass to the child. Show him/her how the magnifying glass makes a blade of grass or a stone look larger. For example, look at the blade of grass with just your eye, then look at it through the magnifying glass. To model respect for the earth, do not pick up stones and do not tear up blades of grass to look at them.
- With the child, quietly look at any interesting things within the roped-off area, such as dandelions, tiny plants, leaves, sticks, and pebbles. If you see an insect, point it out to the child and invite him/her to look at it with the magnifying glass. Again, to model respect for the insect, do not touch the insect or try to pick it up. For example, say: “I see an ant. It looks big when we look at it through the magnifying glass, but it is really very tiny. We don’t want to hurt it, so we won’t pick it up. Look how fast it crawls.”
- Stay with the child for a few minutes, quietly looking at interesting things and watching for and identifying insects.
- Invite the child to continue the activity. For example, say: “Now you watch.”
- Give the child time to continue the activity.
- As soon as the child begins focusing on the grass, quietly get up and let the child work undisturbed. As with all outdoor activities, remain nearby to watch for the child’s safety.
- If the child does not start or does not seem to know what to do, ask: “May I help?” Then gently guide the child’s hand to pick up the magnifying glass and hold it to a blade of grass or a stone. As soon as you feel the child engage, gently remove your hand and allow the child to work on his/her own.
- When the child has finished the activity, encourage the child to return the magnifying glass to its proper place and hang up her/his outdoor clothing. If necessary, do these tasks with the child. This completes the activity.
- Make sure that the magnifying glass stays available — on a low shelf, for example — for the child to work with when she/he wishes.



Extension 2

Extension 1

- To allow the child to experience a wide range of insects and plants, vary the parts of the outdoor area that you mark off each time you do this activity.

Extension 2

- After the child has finished the activity, invite him/her to look at reference books in the library and find pictures of insects or plants seen outside.

Extension 3

- Once the child has acquired experience and skill at observing, draw a picture list of six items the child has identified outside. Examples: a daisy, a caterpillar, a bird, a leaf, an ant and a stick. Invite the child to go outside and find all the items on the list. You could supply the child with six stickers which she/he can put on the list as each item is found. The goal is not to collect the items, simply to look for and find them. (See NAMC's Curriculum Support Material.)

Extension 4

- Bring some outdoor objects inside, to give the child further experience using a magnifying glass. Prepare a work tray containing a magnifying glass and an interesting object from nature. Examples: piece of tree stump; shell; piece of driftwood; pine cone; bird's nest; piece of coral.