

Wonder Walk: Information for Teachers, Chaperones, and Parents

What is a Wonder Walk?

During a Wonder Walk, students have the time, space, and freedom to connect with nature. Students are invited to select from a number of science and investigation tools to enhance their explorations, such as magnifying lens, field microscopes, binoculars, and field guides. Students are encouraged to engage their senses as they explore the Nature Trail using scientific tools to get up close with nature.

Students choose when to stop and explore nature along the trail. Conner Prairie staff members act as facilitators, asking open-ended questions to encourage students to observe closely, share observations, and use resources such as field guides or mobile apps to learn more about their observations.

Beliefs from Conner Prairie's Learning Philosophy:

- Learning is unique and personal. All learners have the right to construct their own knowledge through interactions with the people and environment around them.
- Everyone deserves time, space, and freedom to notice, question, feel, and settle into the process of learning, removing the pressure of expected outcomes or final products.
- We provide limitless opportunities that honor and celebrate their individual needs, passions, interests, dreams, and fears.
- We facilitate learning through mindfully observing, deeply listening, thoughtfully questioning, intentionally curating the environment, and utilizing grounded theory research.

How can you support learning during this field trip experience?

- **Ask open-ended questions** such as: *What do you notice? What's the same/different? What is new and interesting for you? What are you wondering? How did you know that? What do you suppose would happen if...? How is using the scientific tool similar or different to not using a tool when you are exploring in nature? What patterns do you notice?*
- Try to avoid naming what is being observed. Use phrases that **encourage elaboration** on what the student is noticing, thinking, feeling, and observing. *What do you notice? What does it remind you of? How does using the tool help you in your observations?*
- **Let the students guide** transitions to the next observation. Rather than saying "Are you ready to move on?" or "Do you want to try this now?", encourage students to move at their own pace and let curiosity be their guide. This gives children the opportunity to sink into their own discovery and develop their sense of self.



Continue the wonder at school and home environments:

- Invite students to locate a “sit spot.” This is an outdoor location to visit again and again to notice patterns, changing of seasons, local wildlife, and more.
- Take a “Noticing Nature” walk using senses.
 - Sight: *What can you see? What is moving? What is still? What colors do you see?*
 - Sound: *What do you hear? Where are the sounds coming from? Are the sounds loud, quiet, repeating, natural or machine-made?*
 - Touch: *What can you feel? What’s the texture? What else feels this way?*
 - Smell: *What can you smell? What does it remind you of? Describe the smells.*
 - Thoughts/feelings: *How does this make you feel? What does it remind you of?*
- Collect and Create: Notice natural objects that bring you wonder or joy. If they are safe to touch and gather, collect them as you explore.
 - Use sticks to write your name or draw a picture
 - Stack rocks as tall as you can
 - Use found objects such as leaves, seeds, sticks, etc to create pieces of artwork. Leave the artwork for others to find and change.
 - Use found objects to make sounds and music.
- Practice mindfulness in nature. Open up and pay moment-to-moment attention. Try taking an “awareness walk” or “awe walk.” Ask yourself and others: *What are you noticing? What are you drawn to? Open your eyes/ears/senses to unnoticed beauty.*
- Utilize technology to support learning. Use free apps such as Merlin or Seek to identify local birds, plants, insects, and other wildlife. Encourage “wild-snapping” by taking photos of intriguing images from nature or “sound-catching” by capturing naturally made sounds. Turn off phone sounds, rings, and notifications when out in nature as a way to stay present while exploring.

Time spent in nature is good for us!

There’s a growing body of research and evidence showing that time spent in natural environments can benefit our physical and mental health. Benefits include: reduction in stress and cortisol levels, boosts in immune system function, increase in Vitamin D levels, impulse control, increase in creativity and problem-solving, mental restoration and calming, and numerous other benefits. Additionally, time spent in nature is shown to have links with building confidence, improvement of academic outcomes, increase of environmental knowledge and environmental stewardship behaviors, and healing associated with trauma. For more information please contact Michelle Morton, Nature Engagement Specialist at Conner Prairie, at morton@connerprairie.org.

Academic standards and Research

[Kindergarten Science](#): Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals need to survive. (K-LS1-1)

[First Grade Science](#): Make observations to construct an evidence-based account that young plants and animals are like, but not exactly like, their parents. (1-LS3-1)

[Second Grade Science](#): Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats. (2-LS401)

[Grades K-2 Crosscutting Science Concept](#): Relative scales allow objects and events to be compared and described. (CC.3. K-2: Scale, Proportion, Quantity)

[Third Grade Science](#): Use evidence to support the explanation that traits can be influenced by the environment. (3-LS3-2)

[Fourth Grade Science](#): Use a model to describe that animals receive different types of information through their senses, process the information in their brain, and respond to the information in different ways. (4-LS1-2)

[Fifth Grade Science](#): Make observations and measurements to identify materials based on their properties. (5-PS1-3)

[Grades 3-5 Crosscutting Science Concept](#): Natural objects and/or observable phenomena exist from the very small to the immensely large. (CC.3 3-5: Scale, Proportion, Quantity)

[6th grade Science](#): Construct an explanation that predicts patterns of interactions among organisms across multiple ecosystem. (MS-LS2-2)

[Seventh Grade Science](#): Gather and synthesize information that sensory receptors respond to stimuli by sending messages to the brain for immediate behavior or storage as memories. (MS-LS1-8)

[Eighth Grade Science](#): Use argument based on empirical evidence and scientific reasoning to support an explanation for how characteristic animal behaviors and specialized plant structures affect the probability of successful reproduction of animals and plants, respectively. (MS-LS1-4)

[Grades 6-8 Crosscutting Science Concept](#): Phenomena that can be observed at one scale may not be observable at another scale. (CC.3 6-8: Scale, Proportion, Quantity)

Time spent in nature is beneficial in many ways. Here are some articles and research studies for further reading:

Chawla, L. (2020, August 5) Childhood Nature Connection and Constructive Hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss. *People and Nature (British Ecological Society)*
<https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pan3.10128>

Children & Nature Network. (2016) Nature Can Improve Academic Outcomes.
https://eadn-wc04-796033.nxedge.io/wp-content/uploads/CNN20_BNAcademicOutcomes_23-3-25.pdf

Cohen, D. (2023, April 14) Why Kids Need to Spend Time in Nature. *Child Mind Institute*.
<https://childmind.org/article/why-kids-need-to-spend-time-in-nature/>

National Wildlife Federation. (2010, August 4) Whole Child: Developing Mind, Body and Spirit through Outdoor Play. [https://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Be%20Out%20There/BeOutThere_WholeChild_V2.ashx](https://www.nwf.org/~/media/PDFs/Be%20Out%20There/BeOutThere_WholeChild_V2.ashx)

Weir, K. (2020, April 1) Nurtured by Nature: Psychological Research is advancing our understanding of how time in nature can improve our mental health and sharpen our cognition. *Monitor on Psychology (American Psychological Association)* <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>

CONNER PRAIRIE

STEP INTO THE STORY