

FOUR WINDS

NATURE INSTITUTE

Engaging Children in Science Practices, Discussion, and Learning

Introducing Each Unit

Each *Nature Program* unit begins by introducing a natural phenomenon that children can explore, observe, wonder about, question, and discuss, usually in small groups. During these initial explorations, adults can:

- observe what children are doing, asking, and discussing.
- engage in student learning with noticing, wondering, and thinking questions.
- use observations to frame follow-up activities.

Noticing and Wondering

There is sure to be energy and excitement in the air as children make discoveries and follow their natural curiosities. As adults, we can remember that feeling of joy and wonder in moments of catching frogs, collecting rocks, and gazing at passing clouds. These are the “aha” moments that tie children to their learning experiences and leave a lasting impression. Adults can channel this energy and express their own enthusiasm and curiosity by asking children about what they notice, wonder, infer, or think about the topic (suggestions below). These are the conversations of scientists. And this engagement encourages children to think and feel like the scientists that they are, naturally.

- What do you notice about _____? (*the shape of this beaver chew*)
- What catches your attention?
- Can you describe this thing? What color is it/does it feel like/shape/how many legs?
- What is going on here? What do you see/hear/smell?
- I’m surprised to see _____. What surprises you?
- I wonder...
- Your question makes me wonder. What if...
- I wonder what it is like to be _____. (*a bird*) Let’s pretend to be (*birds*).
- How do you know that _____? (*it is an insect*)
- What is your evidence that _____? (*a squirrel lives here*)

Framing Learning Activities

Our learning activities provide opportunities for children to utilize a variety of science practices to answer their questions and figure out the core ideas that frame each unit. The activities are ordered in a way that supports student learning as it unfolds, but it is essential to carefully select activities to suit your particular group of children. Spending time outdoors is the heart of learning about natural science. Talk with your classroom teacher about scheduling a workshop either before or after a planned outdoor break to maximum outdoor time and minimize transitions.

