



FOUR WINDS
NATURE INSTITUTE

Four Winds Nature Institute
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THE NATURE PROGRAM

Why do spiders spin webs?
What birds are singing in our woods?
How far will dandelion seeds float?
How do beavers chew under water?

Four Winds's *Nature Program* encourages curious kids to explore nearby nature and ask questions, and then gives them the opportunity, knowledge and skills to discover the answers.

Each month in schools across northern New England, more than 800 adult volunteers lead *Nature Program* workshops for some 8,500 students in hundreds of K-6 classrooms. Four Winds's *Nature Program* includes over 40 individual lessons grouped to illustrate five broad natural science concepts. Throughout the year, children explore one of these concepts in depth through a series of eight monthly workshops.

Far from being a canned curriculum, the *Nature Program* provides hands-on science education intimately tied to the students' own community. The schoolyard becomes a resource-rich classroom where children interact regularly with the natural world. They learn to use appropriate tools, including all their senses, for observation and collection of data. They practice problem solving and experimentation in science investigations. They learn to look at the familiar with fresh eyes and ask productive questions about what they observe.

Four Winds's *Nature Program* supports formal education by reinforcing science learning standards, and by involving parent



in the learning community. Adult volunteers and teachers are co-learners displaying scientists' habits of mind as they encourage children to make inquiries, investigate, and explore.

Each lesson strives to engage students of all learning styles by incorporating language arts, math, movement and art in addition to science instruction. Writing haiku while sitting in a grassy field, recording the growth rate of dandelion flowers, creating a mural of the local pond, building a model bird nest with natural materials — all help children observe and learn about the natural world.



The *Nature Program* utilizes a “teach the teacher” model. Throughout the year, a Four Winds naturalist-educator comes to your community each month to lead a two-hour informational presentation for parents and other volunteers. These volunteers then team-teach the lesson in individual classrooms. Two volunteers acting as program coordinators serve as administrative liaisons with Four Winds.

In the workshop, we discuss ways to tailor each lesson to the learning needs of younger and older students. For example, while studying leaves, kindergartners may look at different leaf shapes, while sixth graders may examine the physical structure of leaves and learn about photosynthesis. Teaching materials like skull sets, gall kits, audiotapes, photos and diagrams are provided for each unit along with informational handouts.

The idea that nature is everywhere becomes clearer with each lesson as students explore key science concepts. Nature Program volunteers help children recognize “patterns of similarities,” compare “life cycles,” and think about “structure and function” when examining the characteristics of organisms. Students begin to understand the complexity of “ecosystems” as they explore what lives at the edge of the soccer field, in the patch of woods beyond, or in the shrubs out front. In the *Nature Program*, children learn to observe, to question, to test their ideas, and to share their discoveries.

BECOMING A NATURE PROGRAM VOLUNTEER

You don’t need a science degree or teaching certificate to be an effective Four Winds volunteer, just an enthusiastic interest in learning and sharing. All the necessary background information and learning activities are clearly explained at the monthly training workshops. Background information, lesson plans, handouts and specialized teaching materials provide all the resources necessary to present an informative and engaging classroom unit.

Volunteers are parents and community members who value the opportunity to learn and discover the wonders of nature with children. Each volunteer dedicates about 5 hours a month to the program, including 2 hours in training, 1-2 hours of preparation, and 1-2 hours in the classroom teaching with a partner. The adult training sessions are fun, collegial gatherings. And the children’s lessons are filled with questions, discoveries, stories, laughter and learning.



To find out more about the
Four Winds Nature Program,
call us at (802) 353-9440 or email
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Also, visit our website:
www.fourwindsinstitute.org

