

1. APPRECIATING THE BEAUTY OF CREATION

This Lesson's Goals

- » *To sense God's presence in the natural world*
- » *To marvel at the beauty and complexity of the Earth*
- » *To encourage observation*
- » *To promote a sense of comfort with being a part of nature*

Opening [15 min.]

Gather for a few moments of silent worship.

If you have a familiar pattern to begin your Sunday or First Day School class, workshop, camp session, etc., see how you can adapt it to the purpose and opening materials of this chapter.

If this is your first time with these children, play a name game and have name tags.

Songs

Pick one or two of the following songs to sing.

All Things Bright and Beautiful
Earth was Given as a Garden
For the Beauty of the Earth
God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
Magical Earth
It's a Beautiful Day

Sample Agenda

Posting a simple agenda can help both the teachers and the children stay on track. Pick and choose which activities work best for you and your group. If your total program time is less than one hour, you may want to simplify the opening and then focus on two to four activities from those listed below, allowing for the age and size of your group, season and weather, and space and materials needed.

- 1. Opening:** Silent Worship, Song, Scripture, Sharing
- 2. Large Group Activity**
- 3. Small Group Activities**
- 4. Closing & Sharing of Take-Home Materials**



Scripture [5-10]

Psalm 98:4-9

Acclaim the Lord, all people on Earth,
break into songs of joy, sing psalms.
Sing psalms in the Lord's honor with the harp,
with the harp and the music of the psaltery.
With Trumpet and echoing horn
acclaim the presence of the Lord our king.
Let the sea roar and all its creatures,
the world and those who dwell in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the hills sing aloud together
before the Lord;
for he comes to judge the Earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples in justice.

Scripture Sharing

- » What does opening scripture tells about our relationship to our world?
- » How can rivers clap, hills sing?
- » What is wonderful about our world?
- » What is amazing for its great or small size or other qualities or abilities?
- » How are justice and righteousness both similar and different?

Large Group Activity

Look at This! [5-10]

Materials: Present photos, slides, or posters of wonders of the world, both "natural" and human-made. Old calendars are a good source. Try to have a range of scale from microscopic to aerial and satellite photos.

Share what you brought. Ask children to point out what they like, what they see as particularly wonderful, beautiful, or awesome. Ask each child to share with a partner a place they know outdoors that they love. What does it look like? What do they love about it?

Small Group Activities

1. Observing [10-15]

Materials: Two toilet paper rolls per person, glue sticks, duct tape, hole punch, yarn, scissors, magnifying glasses.

Have children create their own binoculars by using two toilet paper rolls. With a glue stick, secure the two rolls together, side by side. Using duct tape, wrap around the rolls to form the binoculars. With a hole-punch, make a hole on the outside of each roll. Attach a length of yarn through each hole, long enough to hang loosely around the

neck of each participant.

Equipped with your binoculars or magnifying glasses, and field guides, head outside. If weather permits, lie down on the ground and look up into the sky. (Don't look directly at the sun.)

Ask the children what they see (wires, seeds, clouds, planes.) Ask how far up the sky goes.

Have the children roll over to look at the ground and tell what they see. Focus their observations by giving each child a loop of string or wire coat hanger.

If possible, give the children magnifying glasses to examine the ground more closely.

What do you imagine is under the ground?

Older children may notice more details and may enjoy learning to identify various plants, animals, and objects.

If a child is to keep
alive
his inborn sense of
wonder . . .
He needs the
companionship of
at least one adult who
can share it,
rediscovering with him
the joy,
the excitement and
mystery
of the world we live in.
– Rachel Carson

2. Beautiful Earth [5-10]

Materials: Tag board or heavy paper, scissors, glue sticks, and marking pens, photos, slides, or posters of wonders of the world [same as the Look at This! activity]

Create collages as a group or as individuals and share with each other. Find apt titles and perhaps you can post the collages where people can enjoy them. The point is to appreciate how beautiful and wonderful our world is.

3. Story Reading [10]

Read aloud *Keep Running Allen* by Clyde Robert Bulla, *Earth to Audrey* by Susan Hughes, or *Anna's Table* by Eve Bunting. All three show children who have healthy and creative relationships with the Earth. Make a list of other books with this theme. For chapter books, have those who have read them give brief reviews. The lists and reviews could be shared with families or in your newsletter.

4. Special Plot [5]

This is a great beginning activity because you can return to it in later chapters.

Select a square of land about one yard or meter per side for on-going study by your group somewhere near your classroom. Mark its corners or edges so you can return to it easily. Examine it closely. Use magnifiers.

- » What grows and lives there?
- » Is it wet or dry?
- » Warm or cold?
- » Shady or sunny?
- » Covered with leaves or snow?
- » Which plants are intentionally planted?
- » Which are volunteers (no one planted them on purpose)?

Take photographs of it and your group. Plan for your group to visit this plot of land in following days, weeks, or months to note how it changes.

5. Geode [5-10]

Bring one or more unopened geodes. Look at the geodes first. The inside could be hollow or solid, agate, clear or colored quartz, or other crystals. Pass geodes around and let everyone hold one and guess what is inside.

Put each geode inside a sock or a cloth bag before tapping it lightly with a hammer to crack it open. Look at what you find. You may be able to give out pieces to everyone to take home.

How are people you don't know yet like geodes?

Small red geodes are often sold for a reasonable price at museum, science, craft, or children's activity stores. Meteorites are also very useful to have and share and talk about their age (which is for 90% of them equal to the age of Earth). They are relatively common and not very expensive.

6. Look Up – Clouds [15-20]

Look at the sky on a day with at least some clouds. Follow or adapt instructions from the *Cloudman Discovery Notebook* found at <www.cloudman.com/instructions.htm>

Prepare group or individual notebooks you can return to as seasons change.

Extend this exercise to not only include what is imagined in clouds but to also imagine you are not looking up but rather looking down into the Universe, sky. "Up" is very

relative and looking down causes us to rethink our relationships. Invite the children to notice that from the looking down perspective we can observe (with a little pinch of eyes and a big pinch of imagination) that the movements of things in the sky, can be changed to a sensation of Earth, moving as we are held to it by gravity, and with our backs stuck to the ground.

7. Appreciating the Beauty of Nature [5-10]:

This closing prayer from the Navajo Way Blessing Ceremony is an invitation to appreciate the beauty of life around us at all times. It is often used in a ritual in which one faces each of the four directions and repeats the prayer in each location. You can invite the children to stand (preferably outdoors) in each of the cardinal directions and repeat at least the first part of the prayer. The text to both prayers are available at the end of the chapter as Take Home Pages.

With beauty before me may I walk
 With beauty behind me may I walk
 With beauty below me may I walk
 With beauty above me may I walk
 With beauty all around me may I walk

For an older group, you may consider sharing the rest of the prayer in a call and response format.

Today I will walk out, today everything negative will leave me.
 I will be as I was before, I will have a cool breeze over my body.
 I will have a light body, I will be happy forever, nothing will hinder me
 I walk with beauty before me
 I walk with beauty behind me
 I walk with beauty above me
 I walk with beauty around me. My words will be beautiful.
 In beauty all the day long, may I walk.
 Through the returning seasons, may I walk.
 On the trail marked with pollen, may I walk.
 With the dew about my feet, may I walk.
 With beauty before me, may I walk.
 With beauty behind me, may I walk.
 With beauty below me, may I walk.
 With beauty above me, may I walk.
 With beauty all around me, may I walk.
 In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively may I walk
 In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively may I walk
 My words will be beautiful

Close with a moment of silent worship.

8. The Cosmic Meditation Attributed Yogananda [5-10]

If it is possible, have the children gather outdoors. Ideally, have an interesting foreground and a panoramic view, as well as a sense of movement, because the mind is naturally attracted to movement and that will help keep your attention. If you can be near a lovely open space, creek or body of water, all the better. Invite the children to sit with their eyes closed and become aware of their body for a few moments.

Say: Now open your eyes and look at the pebbles on the ground, and the twigs and the leaves, and try to feel that you are living in those, just as much as you are in your own hands and feet.

After doing this for a while, extend your awareness out to eight or ten feet. Watch the small trees and the grasses waving in the breeze and feel the exhilaration of the wind as it blows through the grasses and moves your hair back and forth. Feel yourself nodding on the leaves, swaying back and forth on the breezes.

Then, extend your awareness out farther to twenty or thirty feet, to taller trees and larger branches.

Expand your awareness now to as far as you can see. (If near water: "Feel the ripples of the water and the sunlight on your skin. Imagine that your skin is the water.") Try to feel in your spine the strength of a tree. Try to feel the quality of each thing, and let your attention flow from one thing to the next.

Now bring your attention back to this place you are sitting and the people around you.

Discussion questions might include: What did you notice about this experience? In your body? In your thoughts? What was it like to imagine being connected to other living things?

Provide paper and art supplies and invite children to draw their experience and then share with the group the images that they created.

Source: <spiritofmaat.com/archive/may1/cornell.htm>

[Spirit is] that
wisdom
which is pure
from above,
which is gentle
and easy to be
entreated,
not hurtful, nor
destructive,
but is to the
preserving
of the whole
creation.

– George Fox

Closing [10-15]

Wonder Movement Circle

Stand in a circle.

One person begins saying his/her name and something wonderful in our world and does a simple motion or gesture to go with it. [Example: "Sandy--dandelions:" mime blowing the ripe seeds.]

Everyone repeats the name and wonderful thing and does the movement.

The second person says his/her name and wonderful thing and gives a motion to go with it.

Everyone repeats the first two names and items before going on to the third. After the third, repeat all three and so on, with each person in turn adding a new item to this chorus.

When everyone has participated, ask each child to finish the sentence "Today I learned..."

Close with silent worship.

Having a clear closing is more important to children than to most adults. If you have a usual way of closing all your sessions, see how you can adapt that to this curriculum. If not, you and the children may develop one. You could, for example, always repeat one of the songs sung at the opening. Thank you!



I Wonder How Many...?

1. How many butterflies can you see?

There are at least five, six if you count a future butterfly. You can color the page.

2. Watch a butterfly flutter by.

Are there different kinds of butterflies at your home?

What kinds of plants do they like to visit?

Butterflies are among the top three pollinators [along with bees and birds] and they're beautiful. Certain moths will eat up food crops.

Find out which ones are a problem in your area.



How can there be enough food for people, moths, and butterflies?



WRITE YOUR OWN HAIKU

A haiku is a very short poem, usually nature-based. Traditionally, in Japan, the poems have exactly 17 syllables, usually in three lines or phrases of five syllables, seven syllables, and five syllables. Sometimes translations from Japanese take fewer or more syllables. Here are some samples.

I look again
In the corner -
Winter chrysanthemum, red.
-- Nakamura

Wind frees the blossoms
As thunder announces rain
Daffodils bow down.
-- Sandra Moon Farley

On the winter river
A sheet of newspaper
Floats open.
-- Seishi Yamaguchi

Fallen autumn leaves
Hugging the rain-washed world,
Tapestry on sidewalk.
-- Sandra Moon Farley

Funny fluffy cloud
Making faces in the sky
Whoosh! It fades away.
--- D

Honey bees searching
Flying through the lovely field
Also dragonflies!

Now it's your turn. Think of an image of something you love – people, plants, or animals, or a place you love outdoors. Use the haiku form to describe what you see or feel, or observe what a person, animal or nature is doing. The best ones often make you think, especially in the last line. Haiku poems use very few words. Rhyming is not expected.

by _____ date _____

Read your haiku aloud and decide which ones you like best. You could copy some and draw an illustration around or next to each one.



Navajo Way Blessing Ceremony

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With beauty above me may I walk.
With beauty all around me may I walk.

Today I will walk out, today everything negative will leave me.
I will be as I was before, I will have a cool breeze over my body.
I will have a light body, I will be happy forever, nothing will hinder me.

I walk with beauty before me.
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I walk with beauty around me. My words will be beautiful.

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