

Ranger Rick Recommends... A Booklist for Ages 3-7

<p>Anna's Table Written by Eve Bunting Illustrated by Taia Morley Creative Publishing International ISBN: 1-55971-841-2</p>	<p>A little girl collects nature souvenirs on a special table in her bedroom. Seashells, feathers, and a geode are part of her grand display. Each treasure has a special story and represents a different aspect of nature's ingenuity.</p>	<p>Activity: Make a Nature Table</p>
<p>And the Good Brown Earth Written and illustrated by Kathy Henderson Candlewick Press ISBN: 0-7636-2301-6</p>	<p>Throughout the seasons, Gram and young Joe work side by side in their vegetable gardens: digging, planting, weeding, and watering. Gram takes a carefully planned approach to gardening, while Joe's style is more carefree. At harvest time, both gardens are filled with ripe, lush vegetables.</p>	<p>Activity: Sprout a Sponge Garden</p>
<p>Around One Cactus: Owls, Bats, and Leaping Rats By Anthony D. Fredericks Illustrated by Jennifer DiRubbio Dawn Publications ISBN: 1-584-69052-6</p>	<p>A saguaro cactus standing in the desert may look solitary, but it is actually a haven for many creatures in a dry land. On each spread, a new animal appears around the cactus. Owls nest in its shelter. Bats sip nectar from its flowers. Snakes watch for prey beneath the spiny arms. A mini-field guide at the book's end provides even more information about all these cactus creatures.</p>	<p>Activity: Make a Pleated Cactus</p>
<p>Bat Loves the Night By Nicola Davies Illustrated by Sarah Fox-Davies Candlewick Press ISBN: 0-7636-2438-1</p>	<p>A pipistrelle bat wakes up in her cozy roost and flies into the night. Follow along on her nocturnal journey as she uses the echoes of her voice to navigate and hunt for food and then returns to her roost to nurse her baby.</p>	<p>Activity: Watching Bats</p>
<p>The Birdwatchers Written and illustrated by Simon James Candlewick Press ISBN: 0763616761</p>	<p>Jess's grandfather tells funny stories about his birdwatching trips. "When I make drawings of the birds, sometimes they make drawings of me too," he says. Jess decides to go along to see for herself. At first she's disappointed when she sees nothing. But after they visit a birdwatching blind, she comes home with a wild story of her own.</p>	<p>Activity: Build a Bird Blind</p>

<p>Growing Frogs By Vivian French Illustrated by Alison Bartlett Candlewick Press ISBN: 0-7636-2052-1</p>	<p>This story follows a spunky little girl and her mother as they carefully collect frog spawn from a pond and watch the eggs transform into adult frogs. Children will learn about hatching, the growth of gills, leg development, and other important steps in the frogs' life cycle.</p>	<p>Activity: Pond Serenade</p>
<p>Isabel's House of Butterflies By Tony Johnston Illustrated by Susan Guevara Gibbs Smith ISBN: 1-57805-128-2</p>	<p>In the mountains of Mexico, young Isabel's greatest treasure is an oyamel tree that provides sanctuary for thousands of monarch butterflies. Isabel is devastated when she learns that Papa plans to cut down the butterfly tree and sell its wood to feed the family, until she comes up with an imaginative idea to save it. This is a beautiful story about the struggle between human survival and conservation.</p>	<p>Activity: Butterfly Mash</p>
<p>Otter Play By Nancy Luenn Illustrated by Anna Vojtech Atheneum Books for Young Readers ISBN: 0-689-81126-8</p>	<p>On a camping trip, a little boy and his parents observe a family of otters. All day long, the boy compares the activities of the otters to those of his own family and finds striking similarities. Spare, rhythmic text is perfect for reading aloud, while children will enjoy identifying the playful otters and other animals and plants in the beautiful illustrations.</p>	<p>Activity: Face Fingers</p>
<p>Sunflower House By Eve Bunting Illustrated by Kathryn Hewitt Harcourt Brace & Company ISBN: 0-15-200483-1</p>	<p>In early spring, a young boy plants sunflower seeds in a circle. They grow into a ring of mammoth flowers with lots of room to play inside. It's a sunflower house! The boy and his friends enjoy the house all summer. When the flower petals become tinged with brown and start to fall, the children collect seeds to grow another sunflower house next spring.</p>	<p>Activity: Seedy Socks</p>
<p>You're a Bear By Mavis Jukes Illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher Alfred A. Knopf ISBN: 0-375-80267-3</p>	<p>Under a hooded brown jacket, a young girl imagines she's a bear. The left-hand pages of the book depict the events of a real bear's night prowling, including sniffing for food, thrashing bushes for berries, and fishing in a stream. On the right-hand pages, the girl imitates the bear's actions. The lyrical narrative and lush illustrations lead children through a fanciful adventure they'll want to repeat over and over.</p>	<p>Activity: Bear Claw Cookies</p>

Ranger Rick Recommends... A Booklist for Ages 7-12

<p>Backyard Detectives: Critters Up Close By Nic Bishop Tangerine Press ISBN: 0439174783</p>	<p>Do you like getting down on your hands and knees and exploring what's creeping and crawling in a garden or lawn? This book zooms in on backyard habitats with lots of close-up photographs of the creatures that live there. We suspect you'll soon be out the door to see the real thing—and a picture index at the back of the book will help you identify what you find.</p>	<p>Activity: Small World Safari</p>
<p>Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices By Paul Fleischman Illustrated by Eric Beddows ISBN: 0064460932</p>	<p>This classic Newbery winner is a book of poetry all about insects. But that's not all. Every poem is designed to be read by two people—at the same time! The two voices blend to create fascinating combinations that are sometimes funny, sometimes factual, and always fun to perform or listen to.</p>	<p>Activity: Tales by Two or More</p>
<p>The Butterfly Alphabet Words and photographs by Kjell Sandved Scholastic, Inc. ISBN: 0439079470</p>	<p>One day the author of this book looked at the pattern on a moth's wing and noticed a perfect letter <i>F</i>. That was the beginning of a lifelong passion: to find and photograph every letter of the alphabet on the wings of butterflies and moths. This stunning book took 25 years and visits to over 30 different countries. It's a fascinating collection that reveals the wonders of nature through a close-up lens.</p>	<p>Activity: Butterfly Garden</p>
<p>Diary of a Spider By Doreen Cronin Illustrated by Harry Bliss Joanna Cotler ISBN: 0060001534</p>	<p>For sure laughs, you'll love these daily entries written by a spider. When Spider's mom tells him he's getting too big for his skin, he molts. At school he practices not fire drills but vacuum cleaner drills. (Vacuums eat spider webs and are very, very dangerous, he explains.) Lively cartoons and wacky humor will have you chuckling, but you just might learn something about life with eight legs!</p>	<p>Activity: Webs and Other Wonders</p>
<p>The Raft Written and illustrated by Jim LaMarche HarperTrophy ISBN: 0064438562</p>	<p>Nicky isn't excited about spending the summer at his grandmother's cottage. "There's nobody to play with," he complains. "She doesn't even have a TV." But soon the place works its magic. With the help of a mysterious raft, Nicky begins to discover the river's wild creatures, Grandma's humor and wisdom, and his own artistic talent. This is a serene and peaceful story that perfectly captures the light and mood of summertime on a river.</p>	<p>Activity: Nature Sketchbook</p>

<p>Henry Works Written and illustrated by D.B. Johnson Houghton Mifflin ISBN: 0618420037</p>	<p>Henry is a bear modeled after renowned naturalist Henry David Thoreau. In this book, Henry steps outside on “a perfect day to walk to work.” All day he ambles along watching the weather, talking with his neighbors, picking berries, etc. At last he returns to his cabin and gets down to work: writing a book about his outdoor rambles. A fun introduction to Thoreau’s ideas for young readers.</p>	<p>Activity: Collecting Walk</p>
<p>Owl Moon By Jane Yolen Illustrated by John Schoenherr Philomel ISBN: 0399214577</p>	<p>Late on a winter night, a little girl and her father go owling. Under a bright moon, they walk quietly—and hope. “Sometimes there isn’t an owl, but sometimes there is,” the girl explains. This gentle story, complemented by luminous paintings, conveys the beauty of a nighttime walk, the wordless companionship of father and daughter, and a deep connection with the natural world.</p>	<p>Activity: Night Sounds Hike</p>
<p>The Beauty of the Beast: Poems from the Animal Kingdom Selected by Jack Prelutsky Illustrated by Meilo So Alfred A. Knopf ISBN: 0-679-87058-X</p>	<p>This delightful collection of animal poems includes selections from a wide range of twentieth century poets. It’s a poetic parade celebrating everything from ants and earthworms to elephants and whales. Vibrant, expressive watercolor paintings capture the beauty and diversity of the animal kingdom.</p>	<p>Activity: Animal Charades</p>
<p>Tree of Life: The Incredible Biodiversity of Life on Earth By Rochelle Strauss Illustrated by Margot Thompson Kids Can Press ISBN: 1553376692</p>	<p>"If every known species on Earth were a leaf on a tree, the tree would have 1,750,000 leaves. Humans count for just one leaf on this Tree of Life." Come explore the five kingdoms of living things and see how the smallest bacteria are related to the largest mammals. This book’s combination of basic information and amazing facts truly brings biodiversity to life.</p>	<p>Activity: Leaf Rubbings</p>
<p>Hoot By Carl Hiaasen Random House ISBN: 0-375-82916</p>	<p>In this funny, fast-paced adventure, three Florida middle-schoolers fight to save a group of burrowing owls whose home is about to be turned into the newest Mother Paula’s Pancake House. This Newbery Honor book is perfect for the older reader or could make a great family read-aloud.</p>	<p>Activity: Wildlife Observation</p>

Activities for 3-7 Booklist

Natural Treasures (*Anna's Table*)

Make your own nature table!

Your child probably has natural treasures of his or her own to display on a nature table, as the little girl does in *Anna's Table*. Here are some ways to use a nature collection to develop literacy skills and explore some basic math and science concepts.

What you need

- table
- items collected from nature (seeds, cones, bones, seashells, leaves, pressed flowers, shed skins, rocks, etc.)*
- paper
- markers
- hand lens (optional)
- shoeboxes (optional)

What you do

1. If your child doesn't have a collection of natural items, go on nature walks together to see what you can find.
2. Set up a table to display your child's collection. Or, if you can't spare a table for permanent use, store the collection in shoeboxes and occasionally take out the items for special exploration.

What you talk about

To build your child's thinking skills, use the items in some of the following activities:

- **Handwriting and Spelling:** Help your child practice spelling and handwriting by writing a label for each item with its name and where you found it.
- **Reading and Vocabulary:** Point to an item on the table. Ask your child to read its label. Then ask him or her to tell you five words that describe it.
- **Math:** Use the collection to solve simple addition and subtraction problems. For example, ask: "If you have five shells and I take away two, how many shells do you have left?" Have your child move five shells together, take away two shells, and then count the remaining shells to get the answer.
- **Science:** Use the collection to hone observational skills by encouraging your child to sort, compare, and contrast items. For example, ask your child to arrange the items from largest to smallest, sort the items by color, or separate the items that come from plants from those that come from animals. Or divide items into pairs and ask your child to describe how the items in each pair are alike and different.

* *Note:* Be sure what you collect isn't the home of a living creature. When visiting a park or nature center, always follow its rules about collecting.

Sprout a Sponge Garden (*And the Good Brown Earth*)

<Can pick up free art from YBB KidZone activity of the same name>

Show your child firsthand what happens when a seed gets what it needs.

What you need

- sponge (or a short stack of paper towels)

- tablespoon of birdseed
- cup of water

What you do

1. Soak the birdseed overnight in the cup of water.
2. Dampen the sponge or short stack of paper towels, and sprinkle seeds on it. Be sure to push the seeds into all the little holes on top of the sponge. If you're using paper towels, place the towels on a plate before dampening them and sprinkling them with seeds.
3. Next, place the sponge or towels in a warm, dark place for a few days until you see sprouts.
4. Plant the sprouts in some soil.

What You Talk About

Ask your child:

- What do seeds need to begin to sprout? (*Water and warmth and the food energy inside the seed*)
- Think about what you learned in *And the Good Brown Earth*. What do you think the sprouts need to grow into healthy plants? (*Water, sun, soil, and warm temperatures*)

Pleated Cactus (*Around One Cactus*)

<Pick up free photo from YBB, Aug 05, p. 30>

Find out why pleats are neat for a saguaro.

After reading about the saguaro cactus in *Around One Cactus*, did your child notice that the saguaro has pleats like an accordion? These pleats aren't for making music. They help the plant survive in the dry desert. Making a paper cactus shows how.

What you need

- construction paper (2 green sheets, 1 white sheet)
- tape
- scissors
- yellow crayon or marker

What you do

1. Fold a sheet of construction paper into one-inch pleats. Begin folding on one of the short sides of the paper, flipping the paper over after each fold. You should be able to fold the sheet 10 times.
2. Hold the ends of the folded paper together, overlapping the first and last fold to make a tube. Tape the folds together. The ends of the tube will look like a five-pointed star. Hold the folded tube flat, with pleats showing on both sides of the fold line and trim one end into a rounded shape as shown.
3. Cut arms out of green construction paper and tape them to the pleated cactus body. Cut out a white paper flower as shown. Color its center yellow and tape it onto one of the arms.
4. Stand the cactus up on its straight end. You should be able to see the pleats clearly. Now ask your child to put one hand inside the pleated tube and gently spread his or her fingers apart to see how it expands. When the hand comes out, the pleats shrink back.

What you talk about

Ask your child the following questions:

- What happens when you open your hand inside the cactus? (*The cactus gets bigger, or expands.*)
- Why might a saguaro need to be able to get bigger? (*When it rains in the saguaro's dry desert habitat, the cactus can fill up with water by expanding the pleats in its flesh. It can then store the precious water for the many dry days to come.*)
- What happens when the cactus uses up the stored water? (*The pleats fold back in, as your child can see after removing his or her hand from the paper tube.*)

Bat Watching (*Bat Loves the Night*)

You and your child may have enjoyed bird watching together. But have you tried bat watching? Take some time to catch the maneuvers of these nighttime acrobats.

Bat Watching Pointers

When and Where? The best time to see bats is at dawn or dusk. Good places to watch will have open skies and be near a pond or lake. That way, you'll be able to see the bats silhouetted against the sky as they feed on the insects that gather near the water. Streetlights or other bright lights that attract insects may also bring the bats out.

Do's and Don'ts: While waiting for bats to arrive, remind your child to be still and quiet. If you should find a bat on the ground, or see a roosting bat, do not touch it; it may be ill.

Bird or Bat? How can you distinguish bats from birds in the dark? You can tell by the way they fly. Birds tend to fly in fairly straight lines, and swoop and dive smoothly. Sometimes they glide and fold their wings against their bodies between flaps. Bats' flight paths are herky-jerky, and they never fold their wings during flight. Your child will be amazed to learn that one small bat can eat up to 2,000 insects a night!

Resources

Find more amazing bat facts in *Bats* by Gail Gibbons (Holiday House, 2000) and *Ziping, Zapping, Zooming Bats* by Ann Earle (Harper Trophy, 1995).

Build Your Own Blind (*The Birdwatchers*)

<Pick up blind diagram from YBB, May 05, p. 22. We own all rights.>

A *blind* is a place where you can spy on animals without them knowing you are near. You don't need a fancy blind—you can make one out of a cardboard box!

What you need

- a large cardboard box, big enough for you to sit inside
- a knife (to be handled by an adult only)
- paper and markers
- paint and brushes (optional)
- book or magazine (optional)
- binoculars and camera (optional)

What you do

1. Open one end of the box.
 2. Ask an adult to use a knife to cut a viewing window in the box. The window should be about 2 inches high and 8 to 12 inches across. It should be at a level that's comfortable for you to look through while seated. You may want to make windows on the other sides of the box so you will be able to see out of them too.
 3. If you wish, paint the box so that it will blend in with the surroundings. You can paint it a solid color or paint pictures of leaves, grass, or rocks to *camouflage* (hide) the blind. Let the paint dry completely.
 4. Set the blind where animals are likely to be. One good place is near a bird feeder.
 5. When you sit in the blind, be very quiet and still. You don't want to scare away the animals. Take a book or magazine to help pass the time until some animals show up. If you have binoculars, you will be able to see the animals even closer. Draw pictures of the animals you see, or take photos of them.
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Pond Serenade (*Growing Frogs*)

Frogs, crickets, and mockingbirds all have special songs to sing. With four people, you can simulate their lively night music.

What you do

The first singer starts by repeating his or her animal sound. One by one, the other singers join the chorus until the sound of a busy nighttime pond emerges.

1. The first singer (bullfrog) repeats "potatoes" in a low monotone.
 2. The next singer (green tree frog) repeats "friiiiiied bacon," making the "i" long and ascending the scale, then dropping back down to say "bacon."
 3. Singer number three (cricket) repeats "tomatoes" very quickly and in a high-pitched voice.
 4. The final singer (mockingbird) repeats "French toast," drawing out the first word and ascending the scale while saying "French," and ending by saying "toast" at the top of the scale.
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Butterfly Mash (*Isabel's House of Butterflies*)

This simple treat can attract butterflies to your yard in spring.

What you need

- 1/2 cup of fruit juice that's been left out for a day or two
- large, very ripe banana
- 1/4 cup sugar
- a few small, shallow dishes
- large paint brush (optional)

What you do

1. Peel the banana and use a fork to mash the fruit until it is a thick liquid.
2. Add the sugar and juice and mix well. The mash should be the consistency of thick paint.
3. Portion out the mash into several shallow dishes that you can set in sunny spots in your yard or on your deck or patio.

4. You can also use a large brush to “paint” the mash mixture onto tree trunks, logs, wooden fences, or rocks.

Warning: This mash is good food for butterflies and moths, but because it contains day-old juice, it’s not good for your child to eat.

Makes about a cup of mash

Seedy Socks (*Sunflower House*)

In *Sunflower House*, a boy planted seeds and helped them grow into a ring of giant sunflowers. Now your child can explore how seeds travel and plant themselves.

What you need

- old pair of long white socks
- access to an area overgrown with grass and weeds
- 9 x 13-inch baking pan
- potting soil (enough to fill the socks)
- plant mister filled with water
- brick or similar size block

What you do

1. Pull the socks over your child’s shoes and pant legs.
2. Take a walk in a park, vacant lot, or other area overgrown with grass and weeds. (Watch out for ticks if they live in your area.)
3. After your walk, pull off the socks. Look carefully at the seeds your child has collected on the socks, but do not remove the seeds.
4. Fill the socks with damp potting soil. Spray the socks with the plant mister and lay them in the baking pan.
5. Prop a brick or large block under one end of the pan so the pan is tilted.
6. At the lower end of the pan, add enough water so the ends of the socks can soak up the water and be completely wet.
7. Put the pan in a warm, sunny place.
8. During the next 10 days, continue to put enough water in the lower end of the pan to keep the socks wet. Mist the socks every other day with water.

What you talk about

After approximately 10 days, plants should sprout from the socks. Begin a discussion with your child about these results by saying that seeds need to move to new places so they can grow into plants. Add that there are many ways seeds travel to new places.

- How did the seeds travel in this case? (*They stuck to the socks, and you carried them to your house.*)
- What else might seeds stick to? (*Animals’ fur, feathers, or feet*)
- How do these “sticky seeds” plant themselves? (*They fall off or get picked off and end up in soil.*)
- Seeds travel in other ways too. How do most dandelion seeds travel? Hint: What happens when you blow on a fluffy white dandelion head? (*The wind carries away the seeds.*)
- Some palm trees produce coconuts. Coconuts are the largest seeds in the world. Sometimes people find coconuts on beaches that have no palm trees. How do you think these large seeds got on the beach? (*Ocean currents probably carried them.*)

(For Older Children) You might want to include these points in your discussion:

- Some seeds are eaten when an animal eats fruit. Later the seeds come out with the animal's droppings.
 - Some seeds have little wings that help them twirl through the air (e.g., maple seeds).
 - An acorn is a seed. Squirrels pick up acorns, carry them to new places, and bury them. If an animal doesn't dig up one of these acorns later, the acorn might grow into an oak tree.
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Face Fingers (*Otter Play*) <Pick up spot art from YBB Oct 05, p. 22. We own the rights to this.>

Why do river otters have whiskers? A little role-playing may reveal the answer.

What you need

- *Otter Play* by Nancy Luenn

What you do

1. Ask your child to find a picture of a river otter in *Otter Play*. Then have him or her point to the otter's long whiskers.
2. Ask your child why he or she thinks river otters have whiskers.
3. Then have your child follow these steps:
 - Put your hands on your face (as shown in the diagram).
 - Close your eyes.
 - Now feel your way around the room.

What you talk about

Tell your child that otters use their whiskers the same way she or he is now using fingers.

Ask:

- How are whiskers like fingers? (*They can feel things.*)
 - How do you think whiskers help river otters when they are in the water? (*They help them feel their way around—or “see”—when the water is muddy or cloudy, or when it is dark underwater.*)
 - Would you like to have fingers on your face?
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Bear Paw Cookies (*You're a Bear*) <Pick up free photo from WAB, Feb 06, p. 19>

Is your child hungry as a bear? These no-bake cookies will earn lots of paw applause!

What you need

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/4 cup milk or soy milk
- 1 1/2 tablespoons cocoa
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups of unrolled oats
- slivered almonds
- wax paper

What you do

1. Mix first four ingredients together in a saucepan and bring to a rolling boil over medium heat. Boil for two minutes, stirring constantly.

2. Remove pan from heat and stir in vanilla and oats. Mix well. Allow to cool a bit so your child won't get burned while making the paws, but batter should still be warm when you go to Step 3.
3. To make a paw, drop a tablespoon of batter onto wax paper. Press five almond slivers into one side of the paw to make the claws. Allow to cool completely before digging in.

Makes about 15 cookies

Activities for 7-12 Booklist

Small World Safari (*Backyard Detective*)

Get a closer look at the terrific tiny world right under your feet!

What you need

- old clothes
- magnifying glass or hand lens
- clear container
- scissors or nail

What you do

1. Put on old clothes that you won't mind getting dirty. If you have a magnifying glass or hand lens, take it with you.
 2. You might also want to take a container so you can catch creatures and observe them more carefully. Check your recycling bin for a clear plastic jar or tub. Use scissors or a nail to poke small holes in the container for air circulation.
 3. Head out to your yard or garden, a nearby park, or a patch of woods. Get down on your hands and knees and explore. Carefully turn over rocks or logs or clear away the leaves. This is where lots of insects and other small creatures such as pillbugs, worms, snails, slugs, and salamanders make their homes.
 4. When you find an interesting creature, use a magnifying glass to zoom in. You could also gently place the creature in your container for closer observation. Does it have legs? Eyes? How does it move? Where is it going? Use *Backyard Detective* or another field guide to help you identify what you find. Or pretend you've discovered a brand new species and name it yourself!
 5. When you finish your safari, release any creatures you caught and carefully replace any rocks or logs you've moved.
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Tales by Two or More (*Joyful Noise*)

Gather together and tell a wild tale about your favorite animals in many voices.

What you need

- imagination
- sense of humor

What you do

1. Gather a group of two or more people into a circle. A combination of kids and adults is fun.

2. One person starts the story with a single sentence. For instance: "Once upon a time, there was an alligator that opened its mouth so wide it got stuck."
 3. The next person takes up the tale and adds another line: "A nosy blackbird flew down and landed right on the tip of the alligator's snout."
 4. Continue passing the tale around the circle until everyone has contributed and the tale—however wacky—is complete.
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Butterfly Garden (*Butterfly Alphabet*)

To prepare for a party, you put up decorations and set out snacks and drinks for your guests. Want to throw a butterfly bash? Do the same!

What you need

- Pots, a window box, or a garden plot in a sunny spot
- gardening tools
- an assortment of plants that attract butterflies

Planting a butterfly garden is a good way to benefit butterflies. At your butterfly party, colorful flower "decorations" will bring fluttering beauties flocking, while sweet nectar for sipping and leaves for munching caterpillars will keep your guests happy and healthy.

What you do

1. Choose a sunny place for your garden. You don't need a lot of space—just a few containers on a balcony, a window box, or a garden plot in the yard.
 2. At a local nursery, ask for suggestions about native plants (plants that are meant to grow in your area) that will attract butterflies. To learn more about choosing plants and other tips for butterfly gardens, visit nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/attractbutterflies.cfm.
 3. After you plant your garden, be on the lookout for butterfly visitors. How many different kinds do you see? What colors are they? Do any have interesting patterns like the ones in Kjell Sandved's *The Butterfly Alphabet*? Can you find any letter shapes in the flowers and leaves of your garden?
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Webs and Other Wonders (*Diary of a Spider*)

Spider webs are one of the wonders of the natural world. Capture these and other amazing sights through the lens of a camera—or your own eyes.

What you need

- camera (optional)

What you do

1. Take a camera with you on a walk in a nearby park or other green space. Can you find any spider webs? What other beautiful or interesting things catch your eye? Take turns finding natural wonders and lining up good shots. (Kids under age 13 can enter their best work in *Ranger Rick's* quarterly photo contest. For details and photo tips, visit the Photozone at nwf.org/rangerrick.)
2. Or, try your eye by playing a game of human cameras. Here's how: Grab a partner. You will be the photographer. Your partner is the "camera" and closes his or her eyes. Lead your camera to an interesting view: a close-up of a flower, a landscape view across a meadow, an artistic shot straight up into the branches of a tree, etc. When the shot is lined up just right, tap the camera's shoulder lightly to "open the shutter." The camera opens his or her eyes just long enough to take in the view, then

closes them again. After each picture, ask your partner what she or he saw. Was it what you intended? After taking several pictures, switch roles.

Nature Sketchbook (*The Raft*)

When you draw something, you come to see it in a whole new way.

What you need

For each person:

- sketchbook or several sheets of drawing paper on a clipboard
- pencil
- colored pencils, markers, or paints (optional)

What you do

1. In *The Raft*, Jim LaMarche writes that, “like Nicky, I discovered the power of drawing, and learned that when you draw something, you get closer to it and know it better.” What do you think he means? Can you match the drawings on the raft with the real wildlife Nicky encounters on the river? Watch how the expression on Nicky’s face changes from the beginning of the book to the end. What happens? Why do you think that is?
 2. Now find an outdoor place where you’d like to draw and try these exercises.
 - **Partner Drawing.** Find a partner who’ll be your artist. You will be the describer. As the describer, choose something from nature (such as a leaf, a twig, or a pinecone) without letting the artist get a peek at this mystery object. Then sit down back-to-back with your partner and describe the object in detail. Explain its shape, how big it is, and whether it is smooth, rough, fuzzy, lumpy, etc. The artist will use your description to create a drawing of the object. Afterward, compare the object and the drawing. Can you see a resemblance? Don’t worry if it’s not perfect! This is just for fun and for practice paying close attention to details. When you finish, switch roles.
 - **Contour Drawing.** Choose something small you’d like to draw. Then look carefully at its shape. Imagine that a tiny caterpillar is crawling around the edge of the object. Follow the caterpillar’s path with your pencil, drawing just the outline of the object on your paper. Again, don’t worry if the final product isn’t something you want to frame. This is just a good way to practice seeing shapes and lines.
 - **Free Sketching.** Now choose something to draw any way you like. Study it carefully, noting its shape and its unique details. Then draw what you see. Add patterns, shadows, and colors if you want. When you’re done, share your drawings with each other.
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Collecting Walk (*Henry Works*)

On this collecting walk, you fill your memory with treasures instead of your pockets.

What you need

- notebook
- pencils

What you do

1. In *Henry Works*, Henry spent most of a day walking to work. He had lots of adventures and did some helpful things for his neighbors. When he got home, he had lots to write about in his book. No matter where you live, a walk around your neighborhood or a favorite natural area is a good way to collect ideas for some nature writing of your own.

2. On your walk, keep your eyes and ears open for remarkable things. But instead of filling your pockets with rocks and pinecones and other finds, collect interesting views, questions, ideas, observations, sounds, and smells. You might want to take along a notebook and pencil to jot down notes as you walk, or maybe you'd rather just store them in your memory.
 3. Take turns being the leader of the group. Do you notice different things when you are leading and when you are following? Can you, like Henry, find something helpful to do for your neighbors along the way?
 4. Back at home, save all the treasures you've collected by putting them down in words. One person could be the scribe as each person shares his or her favorite details, or you could all write your own entries. Here are some ideas:
 - Tell what happened on your walk as a story.
 - Write poems describing things you saw (try *haiku*, a poem with just three lines of five, seven, and five syllables apiece).
 - Make lists: of plants and animals you saw or heard, of something you saw in each color of the rainbow, of signs of spring, or of questions you asked.
 - For each of your five senses, write about what you experienced. Complete each sentence: "I saw...", "I heard...", "I smelled...", "I touched...", "I tasted..."
 5. Collect your writing in a special notebook or folder. Take more walks and add to it. Then you can remember and relive your walks any time you want by rereading what you wrote.
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Night Sounds Hike (*Owl Moon*)

As night falls, many animals are just waking up to begin their day. On a visit to this nighttime world, you can hear what they have to say.

What you need

- flashlight

What you do

1. After reading *Owl Moon*, wait until the sun goes down and then take a walk outside. Try to somewhere away from car headlights, streetlamps, and other light so your eyes can adjust to the dark. The best places to hear wildlife are near water, woods, meadows, or other good habitat.
2. Bring a flashlight for safety, but don't turn it on unless you need it. If the moon is out, it will light your way. Give your eyes a chance to adjust to the dark. The longer you are in the darkness, the better your night vision will be.
3. Several times on your walk, stop to listen to the sounds around you. Can you hear a breeze rustling the trees? Is there a chorus of night sounds, including the trill of frogs and toads or the chirping of crickets? If you're very lucky, you might even hear the hoot of an owl.
4. Look for night lights, too. Are there stars sparkling overhead? What shape is the moon? You might see fireflies blinking on and off or catch a glimpse of shining eyes as a night animal makes its rounds.
5. Back home in the light, ask each nighttime hiker to describe what she or he liked about being out in the darkness.

Animal Charades (*The Beauty of the Beast*)

Turning yourself into another animal is a good way to understand it better. It's a lot of fun, too!

What you need

- *The Beauty of the Beast* by Jack Prelutsky

For masks:

- Paper plates
- Scissors
- Construction paper
- Crayons, markers
- Hole punch
- Yarn

What you do

1. Gather a group of people for a game of animal charades. If actors need help choosing an animal to portray or figuring out how to act it out, place the book *The Beauty of the Beast* in another room. Give the actor a moment to step into the other room and gather ideas from the details in the poems.
 2. Then the actor returns to the room as his or her chosen animal. Everyone else calls out guesses about what animal he or she is portraying. The first person to guess correctly becomes the next actor.
 3. If your group enjoys competition, you could divide into teams and keep score. Or you could just play for fun.
 4. After playing several rounds of charades, you could go a step further in transforming yourselves into your favorite animals by making animal masks. Cut two eye holes in a paper plate, and then decorate the mask with paper cutouts, crayons, or markers. Punch a hole on each side of the plate and tie a piece of yarn through each hole. Then put on your masks and have a grand animal parade.
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Leaf Rubbings (*Tree of Life*)

Explore biodiversity in your neighborhood by making rubbings of leaves from a variety of trees.

What you need

- drawing paper
- notebook, clipboard, or other hard surface
- crayons

What you do

1. As you read in *The Tree of Life*, biodiversity is the incredible variety of life on Earth. All around us, living things from all five kingdoms support and enrich our own lives. Thinking of each species as one leaf on a vast tree of life can help us understand the complexity of biodiversity.
2. When the trees in your neighborhood have leaves on them, take a walk and collect one sample of a variety of different leaves.
3. Make rubbings of the leaves. Place a leaf on a notebook or other hard surface. This will work best if the side with the most prominent veins is facing up (for many leaves, this will be the underside). Now lay a sheet of drawing paper over the leaf and rub lightly across the surface with a crayon. The pattern of the leaf will appear like magic on your paper!

4. Take a look at your leaves and rubbings. Can you match them up? Can you sort them into groups based on similar shapes or sizes? Which leaves are your favorites? Do you know the names of any of the trees? If not, can you find out?
 5. Try collecting leaves in two different places, such as a park and a forest. Count how many different leaves you found in each place. Which place has a greater diversity of trees?
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Wildlife Observation (*Hoot*)

The kids in *Hoot* scored a victory for wildlife because they noticed the burrowing owls when many others overlooked them. Do you know what wild animals live in your area? Plan a wildlife observation adventure and find out!

What you need

- binoculars and magnifying glasses
- field guides
- notebook and pen

What you do

1. Make a list of all the places in and around your community where animals might live. Choose one or more of these places and plan a visit to look for wildlife.
 2. At your library, check out some field guides to find out what wildlife you might see and to help you identify them. Look for guides to mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish and other water life, and insects and spiders. You might also want to look at enature.com for field guide information.
 3. Go see what you can see! Bring your field guides and a pair of binoculars. Write down each animal you see, from tiny beetles to flitting birds to big furry mammals. If you don't know an animal's name, write down as many details as you are able to see. You may be able to identify it later with the help of a book, or see if a local nature expert can help you (check your local nature center for likely experts).
 4. For lots more ideas on wildlife observation, and if you'd like to report what you saw as part of National Wildlife Week's nationwide wildlife observation effort, see nwf.org/nationalwildlifeweek.
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