

Learning Guide



Every Kid Outside

We hope you enjoyed listening to our episode about the benefits of outdoor learning.

Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen: Answer these questions to engage students before and after they listen to the episode.

Vocabulary

Discussion Prompts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.3

Urban Nature Scavenger Hunt

NGSS 2-LS4-1; 3-LS3-2

Nature Journal Writing Prompts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.10

Outdoor PE Activities with No Equipment

SHAPE America National PE Standards 1-3

Birdwatching Poem Project

NGSS 2-LS4-1; 3-LS2-1; 3-LS3-1; 3-LS4-2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3.d

Adaptations Match Game

NGSS MS-LS1-4; NGSS MS-LS1-5; NGSS 1-LS3-1; 3-LS2-1; 3-LS3-1; 3-LS3-2; 3-LS4-2

Observe with Your Senses

NMPED SEL: Intentional Development of Skills, Mindsets, and Habits

Additional Resources



The Children's Hour
kids public radio

© 2025 The Children's Hour radio show podcast
<https://www.childrenshour.org/every-kid-outside/>



Get set to listen.

1. Before listening!



Write down your response to one of these questions. Share with a partner or small group when you are finished.

Write about your favorite place to be outside. How does it make you feel to be there?

Would you rather eat lunch inside or outside? Why?

2. After listening!



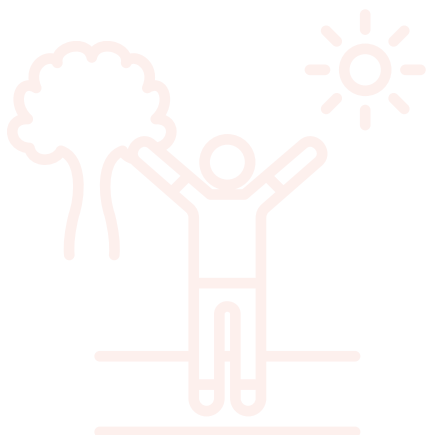
Write down your response to the following question. Share with a partner or small group when you are finished. How did your thoughts about being outside change after listening to this episode?

Would you want to learn in an outdoor classroom? Why or why not?



Vocabulary

outdoor learning environment:	any activity we can do outside which sparks learning, increases health and well being, and raises awareness about our environment
outdoor classroom:	a learning space outside that promotes the integration of the outdoor world with the already established academic curriculum
scat:	animal poop
adaptations:	helpful traits that help animals and plants survive
ornithologist:	someone who studies birds
habitat:	the place where an animal lives





Discussion Questions

1. What is one thing you noticed today that you've never seen before outside?
2. How do animals and plants work together in the place we explored?
3. What do you think this place looked like 100 years ago? What might it look like 100 years from now?
4. What signs of human impact (positive or negative) did you see outdoors?
5. If you could be any animal living in this habitat, which would you choose and why?
6. What adaptations help local animals survive in this environment?
7. How could we study this area more closely—what tools or methods might scientists use?
8. How did being outside today make you feel differently than being in the classroom?
9. What's one outdoor spot you'd like to return to, and what would you want to explore more deeply?

Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner's answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group's ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Urban Nature Scavenger Hunt

You don't have to go on a hike to experience nature. There's plenty of nature in city (urban) life. Hunt for these things at recess or on your next walk around town. Check them off as you find them:

- ☐ A wildflower
- ☐ The sound of birds
- ☐ Three different leaves
- ☐ Something natural that's yellow
- ☐ The tallest tree
- ☐ An insect
- ☐ The smell of a plant
- ☐ Three pieces of trash
- ☐ Something natural that's smaller than a penny
- ☐ Water

Draw something you saw:

1. What do you see in the sky? _____
2. What does the air feel like? Smell like? _____
3. What's making the loudest sound that you hear? _____
4. Take 20 steps. Were they all on concrete? _____
5. How many steps is it to the nearest natural ground or water? _____
6. How much of your hunt was in the shade? _____

Talk About It

1. How does your body feel when you are spending time in nature? How does your mind feel?
2. Albert Einstein, famed theoretical physicist, once said, "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." What do you think he meant?



Nature Journal Writing Prompts

Sensory Walk Prompt:

Take a slow walk outside. What do you see, hear, smell, and feel? Describe the experience using all five senses.

Extension: Circle your favorite sense from today. Why do you think it stood out?

Creature Feature Prompt:

Find an animal (or a sign of one, like tracks or nests). What do you notice about it? What might it be doing or thinking?

Extension: Draw the animal or its tracks. Add labels to show what you observed.

Tree Tales Prompt:

Choose a tree. Describe its size, shape, color, and texture. If it could talk, what story would it tell about this place?

Extension: Write a short "interview" with the tree. Ask it three questions and imagine its answers.

Tiny World Prompt:

Pick a small patch of ground and look closely. What do you see living or growing there?

Extension: Use a magnifying glass (if available) and sketch what you find in your journal. Give your patch of earth a creative name.

Weather Watch Prompt:

Describe today's weather. How does it affect the animals, plants, and how you feel?

Extension: Compare it to another day this week. How does nature change with the weather?

Imagine a New Species Prompt:

Invent a plant or animal that could live in this environment. Describe what it looks like, how it survives, and where it lives.

Extension: Draw it in its habitat and give it a name.

Reflect & Share Prompt:

What was your favorite part of nature journaling this week? What surprised you? What would you like to explore more?

Extension: Create a mini-poster or booklet using your favorite journal entries, drawings, and discoveries to share with the class.



Outdoor PE Activities with No Equipment

Playing games outside promotes physical movement and social skills. Here's a quick overview of some easy, no equipment needed games that kids will love to play outside.

- **Tag:** A timeless game where players chase each other—try variations like freeze tag or shadow tag.
- **Hide and Seek:** Encourages spatial awareness as one player hides and others search.
- **Simon Says:** Players follow commands only if preceded by "Simon says," building listening skills and coordination.
- **Hopscotch:** Players hop through a chalk-drawn grid, which helps improve balance and motor skills.
- **Pirate Ship:** Students follow themed commands from the "Captain," like "Scrub the deck!"—a great mix of fitness and imagination.
- **Animal Tag:** Players move like animals when called out (e.g., hopping like a frog), combining creativity with exercise.
- **Shadow Tag:** Instead of tagging with hands, players try to step on each other's shadows—perfect for sunny days.
- **Rats and Rabbits:** Two teams respond quickly to being called, running to their safety line while being chased by the other team.
- **Grandmother's Footsteps:** One player tries to catch others moving while their back is turned, promoting stealth and body control.
- **Sleeping Lions:** Students lie still while others try to make them move or laugh without touching them—great for calming down after active play.
- **Follow the Leader:** One student leads the group in movements like jumping, stretching, or skipping, encouraging mimicry and creativity.



Birdwatching Poem Project

Project Overview:

Students will explore the world of birds through observation, research, and creative writing. Each student will go outside and find a bird to observe and write an original poem inspired by its characteristics, behavior, and/or habitat. Students will identify the bird and conduct further research (online, in books, and/or interviewing an expert) to accompany their personal observations. Consider doing the entire project in an outdoor classroom!

Duration:

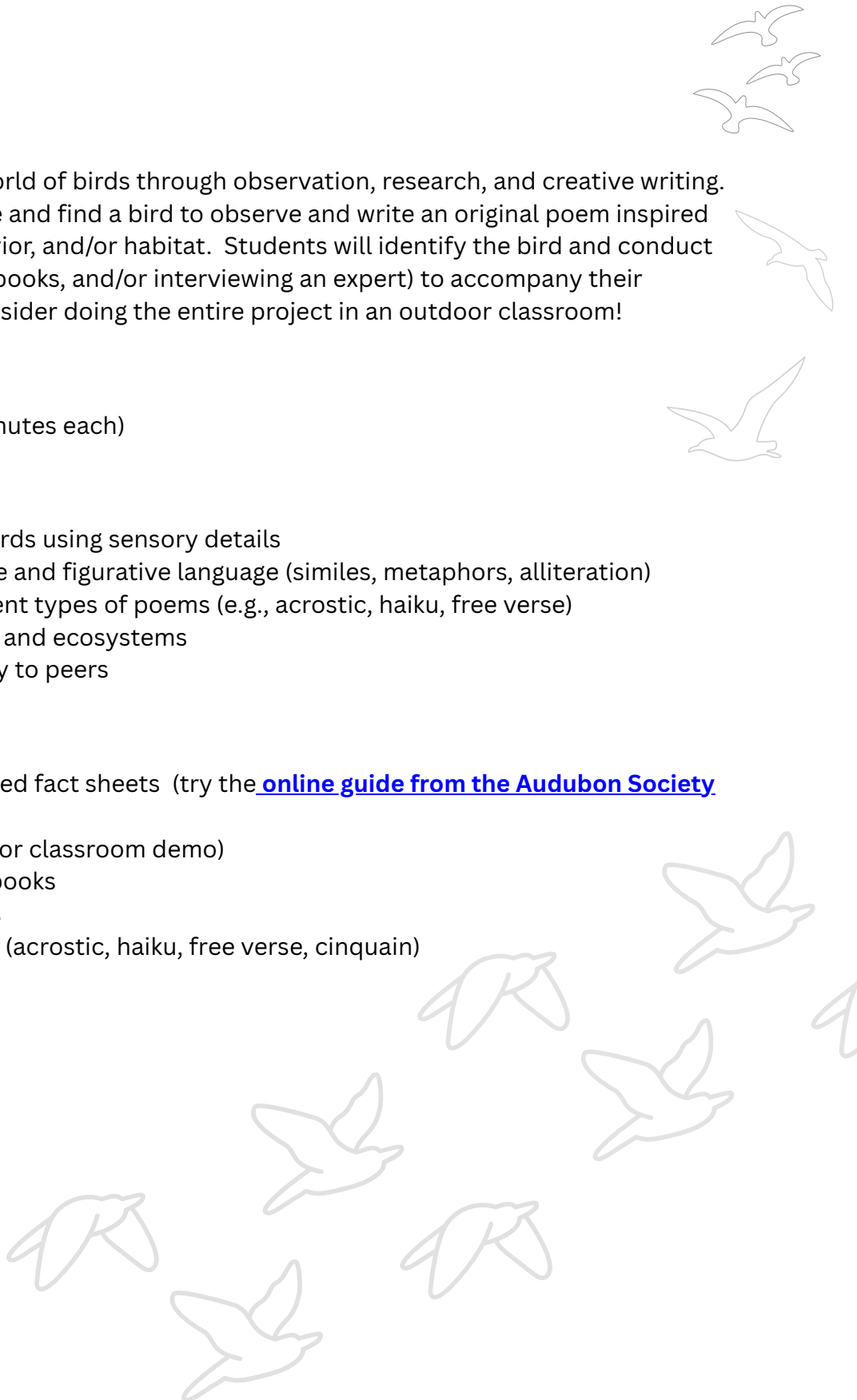
5-6 class periods (45-60 minutes each)

Learning Objectives:

- Observe and describe birds using sensory details
- Use descriptive language and figurative language (similes, metaphors, alliteration)
- Explore and write different types of poems (e.g., acrostic, haiku, free verse)
- Appreciate local wildlife and ecosystems
- Present work confidently to peers

Materials Needed:

- Bird field guides or printed fact sheets (try the [online guide from the Audubon Society](#) or use their [app](#))
- Binoculars (optional or for classroom demo)
- Nature journals or notebooks
- Colored pencils/markers
- Printed poem templates (acrostic, haiku, free verse, cinquain)





Birdwatching Poem Project

Day 1: Building Background

- Activity: Listen to *The Children's Hour* "Every Kid Outside" segment about the birdwatching and poem project Mrs. Dawson's fourth grade class at Valle Vista Elementary School did based on their weekly observations at the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge.

Day 2: Bird Watching & Observation

- Activity: Take a nature walk (schoolyard or nearby park).
- Task: Students choose 1 bird to focus on. They write notes in their "Bird Journal":
 - What does it look like?
 - What sounds does it make?
 - How does it move?
 - Where does it live?
 - What do they like about it?

Day 3: Learn About the Bird

- Mini-Research Session: Read short bird profiles or use books/websites to learn more. Interview an expert if possible.
- Writing Prompt: Describe your bird using all 5 senses.
- Vocabulary Boost: Introduce words like "flutter," "soar," "chirp," "perch," etc.

Day 4: Poetry Writing

- Poem Types Introduced:
 - Haiku (focus on nature)
 - Acrostic (using the bird's name)
 - Free verse (imaginative and descriptive)
 - Cinquain (5-line descriptive poem)
- Students draft a poem about their bird, using their notes and descriptive language.

Day 5: Revise & Illustrate

- Peer review and editing in small groups
- Create an illustration of their bird or its habitat

Day 6: Poetry Reading & Gallery Walk

- Presentation: Each student reads their poem aloud or posts it with their drawing in a classroom "Bird Poetry Gallery"
- Optional: Invite parents or another class

Extension Ideas:

- Extend the observation phase. Coordinate with local wildlife refuge such as Valle de Oro to enrich and extend learning.
- Compile poems into a class poetry book
- Do a cross-curricular tie-in with science (life cycles, habitats, adaptations)



Adaptations Match Game

Cut out the cards for animals, habitats, and adaptations. Match the animal with its habitat and adaptation. Can you think of other adaptations that help each animal survive?

polar bear



Photo credit: Ilya Skinshin

beaver



Photo credit: Vac1/iStock photos

camel



Photo credit: Shutterstock

desert hare



Photo credit: Byrdyak/Getty Images

hummingbird



Photo credit: Kenneth Canning/Getty Images

Antarctic toothfish



Photo credit: Animalia



Adaptations Match Game

Habitats



Photo credit: Wikipedia



Photo credit: Jason Collin

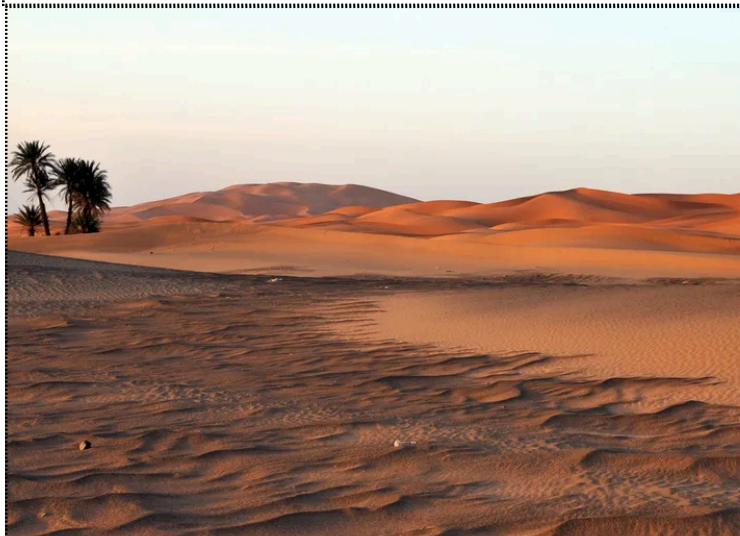


Photo credit: Ignacio Palacios/Getty Images



Photo credit: BBC Natural History



Photo credit: Alexey Seafarer/Canva



Photo credit: Gardenia



Adaptations

Their thick fur insulates them against heat and cold, and large, padded feet prevent sinking in sand.

Their thick and rough paws grip the slippery ice.

They have large, thin ears to cool blood and body temperature.

Their large pointed teeth are adapted for gnawing on trees.

They have a long, thin beak to reach into flowers and drink nectar.

They have antifreeze in their blood to prevent them from freezing in icy waters.



Adaptations Match Game

Answer Key

polar bear



Photo credit: Ilya Skinshin



Photo credit: Alexey Seafarer/Canva

Their thick and rough paws grip the slippery ice.

camel

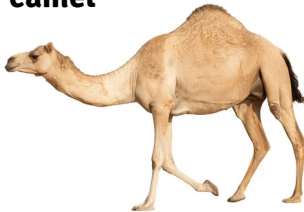


Photo credit: Shutterstock

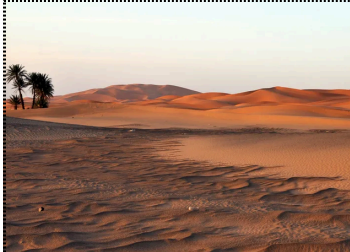


Photo credit: Ignacio Palacios/Getty Images

Their thick fur insulates them against heat and cold, and large, padded feet prevent sinking in sand.

hummingbird



Photo credit: Kenneth Canning/Getty Images



Photo credit: Gardenia

They have a long, thin beak to reach into flowers and drink nectar.

beaver



Photo credit: Vac1/iStock photos



Photo credit: Wikipedia

Their large pointed teeth are adapted for gnawing on trees.

desert hare



Photo credit: Byrdyak/Getty Images



Photo credit: Jason Collin

They have large, thin ears to cool blood and body temperature.

Antarctic toothfish



Photo credit: Animalia



Photo credit: BBC Natural History

They have antifreeze in their blood to prevent them from freezing in icy waters.

Observe with Your Senses



Play the song “We Know the Air is There”

by Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer

How do we know what is around us? We use our senses!

Spend 1 minute observing the world around you using one of your five senses at a time. For each of the senses other than sight, close your eyes to allow you to more easily focus.



Sight: Notice the colors, light, and shapes that you see



Hearing: Can you identify all the different sounds you hear? Do you notice some sooner than others?



Touch: Pay attention to the feel of the air on your skin, the temperature, your clothing, and the pressure of the chair you're sitting in.



Smell: Take a deep breath and inhale the smells around you. Observe the thoughts, emotions, and feelings that surface. Do the smells bring back any particular memories? This can be done either with whatever smells are around you or with specific, intentional fragrances.



Taste: Eat something and really pay attention to flavors. Do they change as you chew?



Additional Resources

[**Sensory Card Nature Scavenger Hunt:**](#) a great way to get pre-readers exploring the outdoors

[**Outdoor Learning and nature activities for kids:**](#) a variety of resources for kids of all ages

[**National Outdoor Learning Library:**](#) practical ways to take learning activities outside

[**Article from Rubicon**](#) about why Environmental Education is Important for Kids

[**Environmental Stewardship Toolkit**](#) of resources to learn, connect, and take action now

[**Easy Nature Play Ideas for Early Childhood Centers:**](#)

For more ideas about doing a [**nature scavenger hunt:**](#)

Downloadable outdoor learning guide, [**Tracks, Scats, and Animal Facts Books & Songs for Kids:**](#)

Birding:

[**Guide for making a Certified Wildlife Habitat®:**](#) Is your yard a bird-friendly place? You can certify your backyard, patio, balcony, garden, or schoolyard as a wildlife habitat with the National Wildlife Federation.

[**Complete lesson for a backyard bird scavenger hunt and exploration of feathers.**](#) Great to introduce elementary kids to birds!

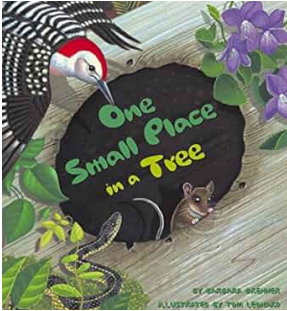
[**Friends of the Rio Grande Nature Center printable activities:**](#) including scavenger hunts, birding activities, and self guided interpretive information

[**Easy Ways to Get Kids Birding:**](#) tips from the Audubon Society

Identify the birds you see using [**an online guide from the Audubon Society**](#) or with [**their app.**](#)



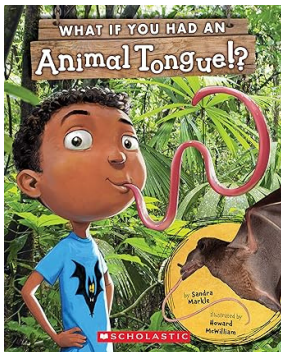
Book List



One Small Place in a Tree

by Barbara Brenner

An exploration of the hidden world inside a tree, revealing how a small hole becomes a thriving home for many forest creatures over time.



What If You Had an Animal Tongue?

by Sandra Markle, illustrated by Howard McWilliam

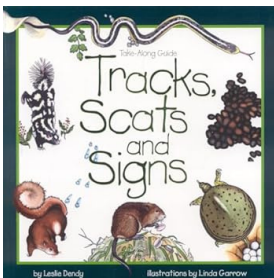
An engaging nonfiction picture book that imagines the everyday implications of having various animal tongues, from a Komodo dragon's split tongue to a woodpecker's thorny one, highlighting how each is uniquely suited to its owner's needs.



The Hike

by Alison Farrell

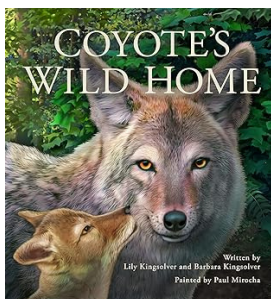
A vibrant picture book that follows three adventurous friends as they embark on a nature-filled journey through the woods, capturing the joy of exploration, teamwork, and discovery.



Tracks, Scats, and Signs

by Leslie Dendy

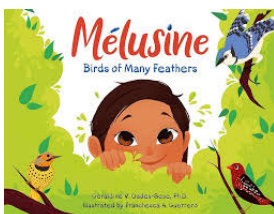
A hands-on field guide that teaches kids how to identify animals by the clues they leave behind, like footprints, droppings, and nests



Coyote's Wild Home

by Barbara and Lily Kingsolver

This book follows a coyote pup and a girl exploring an Appalachian forest, discovering the beauty and balance of the wild.



Mélusine: Birds of Many Feathers

by Geraldine V. Oades-Sese

An engaging picture book that follows a young birder named Mélusine on her quest to find a mysterious bird with a unique song, leading her to discover valuable lessons about diversity, self-acceptance, and belonging.