Facts to know

- **Suggested group size:** six to eight children per adult volunteer
- **Time frame:** group meeting 30 to 60 minutes
- **Recommended ages:** 5- to 7-year-olds (kindergarten through second grade)
- **Materials:**
  - Paint chips (one per member, available for free at paint/hardware stores)
  - Duct tape
  - Paper cups, 3 ounces (one per member)
  - 10 man-made items: balls, food wrappers, plastic bottles, aluminum cans, toys, kitchen utensils, clothing, etc.
  - Pencils or pens (optional)
  - Blank paper (optional)

Purpose
Youth use their senses to explore the beauty, wonder and mystery of the earth.

Background knowledge
People of all ages love to be outside. Being outdoors can be fun, enjoyable and educational. Hands-on experiences in nature promote sensitivity to the natural world. Time spent outdoors builds connections between us and the earth. Through hands-on exploration of the natural world, members become aware of the beauty, wonder and complexity of the earth; share a greater understanding and appreciation for our environment; and develop a commitment to care for the earth.
**Learning Activities**

Note: Because all of these activities involve being outdoors, please do a safety check for dangerous things such as broken glass or poison ivy.

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**Do: Getting Started**

**Rainbow Hike (10 minutes)**

1. Ask the members if they know what a rainbow is. Then ask how many different colors they think are in a rainbow. Tell them they’re going on a rainbow hike to look for some colors.

2. Fan out the paint chips like a deck of cards, color side down. Invite each member to pick a card (brown, yellow, orange, green, red, etc.).

3. With an adult’s help, each member will receive a duct tape bracelet worn around the wrist, sticky side out. Wrap the tape around a shirt or coat sleeve (this way the hair on the child’s arm is protected) and place the colored chip on one side of the tape.

4. The member’s job is to find small objects (or parts of objects) that match the color on the card as closely as possible. Let them know they may not be able to make exact matches. (Identifying shades or hues of a color is challenging for Cloverbuds. Instead, ask them to look for their color; any shade or hue will be correct.) When they find an object, they should stick it on the tape. (Caution them against picking up animals or taking too much plant material.)

5. Gather the members back together and ask them to share what they found.

6. Ask the following questions:
   a. Was finding an exact match hard to do?
   b. Did you find more than one thing that matched your paint chip?

*(Rainbow Hike, 2013)*

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**Do: Digging Deeper**

**Scented Tea Party (15 minutes)**

1. Ask the members to name some of their favorite smells. Then ask how many different smells from nature they know. Tell them they’re going to have a scent tea party.

2. Give each member a small paper cup (3 ounces). Then ask members to find something in nature with a smell they like and to place a bit of it in the bottom of the cup. Let the members explore the area for about 10 minutes.

3. Gather the members back together and share what they found by passing the cups around. Can the members identify what each cup holds using their noses to smell it?
1. The leader should be familiar with the trail used for the activity. Place 10 man-made items along the trail shortly before the hike. The objects can be placed on the ground, on rocks or in tree holes, or hung on branches, using both sides of the trail. They should not be completely hidden or completely obvious. They should be placed no more than 4 to 5 feet off the trail.

2. Gather the group just before the start of the “UnNature” trail. Discuss briefly the differences between human-made and natural things. Explain that the members will be playing nature detectives, looking for things that don’t belong on the trail. (Note: If you are using a trail at a nature center or in a park, you may find some objects, such as trail markers, that are human-made but do belong.)

3. Allow five to 10 minutes to walk the trail. Remind the members to look up and down as well as just off the trail.

4. After the hike, discuss which objects were hard to find. Use them to introduce the concept of camouflage. Talk about animals that use camouflage.

(Human Nature Trail, 2013)
Reflect / Apply

Share: Bringing Closure

Nature Elves (15 minutes)

1. Before the meeting, select any outdoor area, with enough space so members can scatter. Members should be far enough apart to discourage talking.

2. Warmup: Find a quiet, comfortable spot in the outdoors and form a sharing circle. Ask the members what they like to do in the outdoors. Have any of them ever sat quietly while outdoors and listened?

3. Explain that we have a special way to hear all the outdoor sounds. Tell them that the plants around them are magical listening plants, with large antennae that pick up all the sounds. We can hear those sounds by choosing a listening spot. Explain that the magic will work only if they remain as still as possible.

4. Send the children to find a listening spot and listen for five minutes. Call them back and, in a sharing circle, discuss the sounds they heard. Before sending them back to their spots a second time, tell the following story about “nature elves” to help the children focus their hearing.

5. Ask if anyone heard any nature elves while they were listening. Explain that nature elves are very secretive, mystical creatures. Whispering, explain that no one has ever seen a nature elf because they’re very quick. You can see them out of the corner of your eye, but they disappear as soon as you turn your head. Nature elves don’t want to share the sounds of the magical listening spots, so they sneak behind you and whisper things such as: “I’m hungry,” “I wonder what my friend is doing” or “I can’t wait until I get home to play” — anything to distract you from using the magical listening spots. So “this time when you return to your spots, switch those nature elves off and tune in to the magical listening spots!”

6. After another five minutes of listening, pull the group together and discuss: What can sounds tell you about the outdoors? Will a different kind of environment (woods vs. prairies) have different sounds? Why? How would this place sound if you returned to the same spot in three, six or nine months? How did you feel about the human-made sounds compared with the natural sounds?

Apply: Going Beyond

1. Make a new friend, a nature buddy. Collect nature items (leaves, pine needles and cones, rocks, etc.) and use your imagination, paper, glue and markers to turn nature into friends.

2. Have members take turns spying items from nature, such as things that crawl or things with wings. The possibilities are endless!

3. Have members participate in a “one-yard hike.” Give each member a piece of string 36 inches long. Have the members stretch the string out in a grassy area. Then have them drop to their hands and knees and observe closely everything along that string. Discuss what they observed, such as leaves, plants, insects, dead plants and feathers.

Acknowledgements

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Resources
