

Take Learning Outside

Filled with plants, animals, and other wonders of nature, the great outdoors is an ideal learning lab for your youngster. Use the activities in this guide to inspire him to go outside and play while he builds skills that will help him in school.

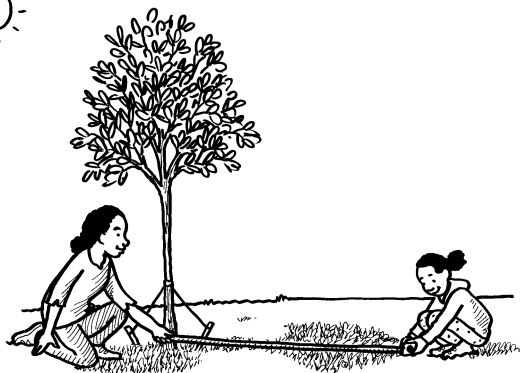


Read “on location”

Encourage your child to make connections between books and real life with this idea.

First, have him list outdoor places where the two of you can sit and read. *Examples:* A big rock alongside a trail at the park, a bench by the basketball court down the street, a picnic blanket under a shady tree in your yard.

Together, find books at home or in the library that fit each location. While sitting on a rock with you, maybe your youngster will read a story about a mountain-climbing expedition. Boost comprehension skills by asking him to think about what he'd need to pack for an adventure like the one in his book—perhaps trail mix, a water bottle, and a rain jacket. As your child reads in each place, let him check it off his list.



Measure a tree

How tall is that tree? On a sunny day, head outdoors with a measuring tape, and your youngster can use math (and shadows) to find out.

Stand in a sunny spot while your child measures your shadow's length (say, 52 inches). Tell her how tall you are, and have her divide your height (65 inches) by your shadow's length ($65 \div 52 = 1.25$).

Your height is approximately 1.25 times the length of your shadow, and at the same moment in time, the tree's height is also approximately 1.25 times the length of its shadow! To

find the tree's approximate height, help your youngster measure the length of its shadow, then multiply by 1.25. So if the shadow is 672 inches long, the tree is about 840 inches tall ($672 \times 1.25 = 840$ inches, or 70 feet).

Shadows change throughout the day, so what happens if she measures the lengths of your shadows at a different time? If yours is twice as long as your height ($65 \times 2 = 130$ inches), the tree's shadow will be, too ($840 \times 2 = 1,680$ inches).

Write haiku

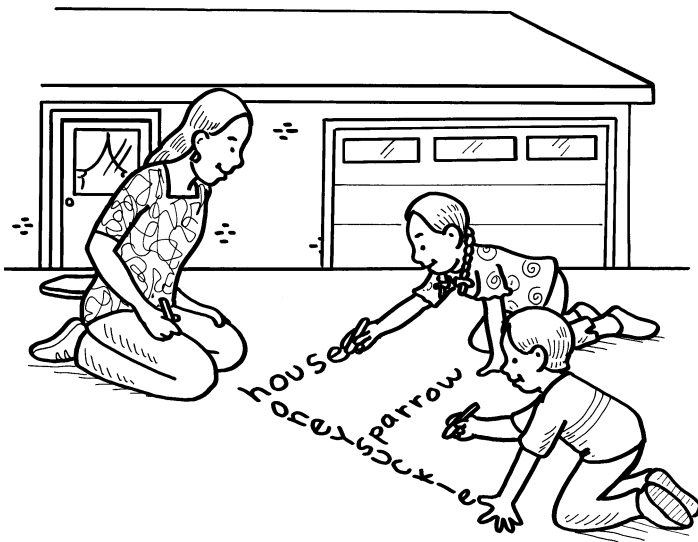
*Butterflies zip by,
playing a wild game of tag.
I wonder who's "It."*

For a fun way to practice writing, suggest that your child try his hand at *haiku*, or traditional Japanese poetry about nature. Lines one and three have five syllables each, and line two has seven.

Let him carry pencil and paper outside when you take a walk or go fishing, and look for inspiration. Maybe he'll spot butterflies chasing each other, clouds in the shape of a castle, or a field of bright yellow flowers. Have your youngster jot down details, then weave them into haiku poems.



continued



Make a crossword puzzle

Sidewalk chalk and pavement are all you need for this activity that boosts your child’s vocabulary and spelling skills.

Each person chooses a different color of chalk. The first player writes down something she spots (say, *honeysuckle*). The next person finds something that shares a letter with the previous word and writes its name crossword-style. She might write *sparrow* starting with the *s* in *honeysuckle*. The next player could use the *w* in *sparrow* to add *web*.

Keep adding words until no one can think of another one or you run out of space. Then, spot something else, and start a new crossword!

Observe animals

Let your youngster pretend he’s a scientist who studies animals. He’ll build observation skills and work on nonfiction writing by creating this field guide.

Sit outdoors together quietly, and have him choose an animal to observe. In a notebook, your child can write about its appearance and behavior. *Example:* “A squirrel has a bushy tail and munches on nuts.” Have him draw pictures and diagrams, and add captions to illustrate each entry.

Tip: Suggest that your youngster add to his field journal when he visits other places where animals live, such as the zoo or his cousin’s farm.

Design a play space

Natural materials like sticks and rocks make great “toys” for imaginary play. Suggest that your child gather outdoor objects and craft supplies to design a miniature play space. She’ll use engineering and creative thinking as she decides how to use the items.



For a pretend campground, she might duct-tape sticks together to build a tent, arrange pebbles in a circle for a campfire, and use twigs for people. Now encourage her to act out different scenarios. Maybe the people will sing songs around the fire or go for a hike. Next, she could make a beach, a construction site, or even an ancient civilization.

Outdoor games



The whole family can play outside together with these friendly competitions that stretch thinking skills.

Category catch. Choose a category of objects you might find outdoors (say, flowers). On each turn, a player tosses a ball straight up in the air. Quick! Name something in the category (*rose, daisy, tulip*) before you catch the ball! If you can’t think of one that hasn’t been named or if you don’t catch

the ball, you’re out. When one player remains, that person chooses the next category.

Triangle brainteaser. Each player should gather nine twigs that are roughly the same length. Then, compete to see who can arrange their twigs to form the most triangles. *Tip:* Look for ways to make triangles *inside* other triangles. Now try again with 12 or 15 sticks each.

ABC scavenger hunt. Have each person write the alphabet vertically on a separate sheet of paper. Then, set a timer for five minutes while everyone searches the yard for items that start with each letter. *Note:* Players can write an item only once, so they’ll need to decide, is that a *bucket* or a *pail*? The winner is the player who has listed the most objects when the timer goes off.