Sample activities in the forest:

A Day of Adventure in the Forest

“If you tell me, I’ll forget it, if you show me, I might retain it, if you allow me to participate, I’ll remember it.”

Chinese proverb
For the theme of A Day of Adventure in the Forest, we present:

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

In this chapter activities are combined around a given theme to create a program for an entire day. The various activities have not been prioritized because there is detailed information on this in the chapters pertaining to the principal themes.

The combined activities are mainly derived from the basic themes SOIL and FOREST AS VITAL LIVING SPACE and the activities from the chapter SEQUENCE OF ACTIVITIES: Beginning-Motivation-End.

Despite the fact that this day of adventure has been designed for the National Forest Park of Bavaria in Germany, it does not require much modification to be useful in tropical forests.

To prepare, you must choose an adequate area, gather the necessary materials and have sufficient personnel to attend to the students divided into small groups. Do not forget the scientists and volunteers who work in the protected area or the parents and other people who oftentimes will be happy to participate in this type of activity.

The success of the teaching methods, the happiness and the enthusiasm of the children will more than compensate for the work and the time invested in preparation.
Contents:

To experience the forest and to understand nature.

Objective: to feel the forest as a vital space and to promote an attitude towards behavior that is harmonious with the forest

Type of activity: lively, very active and at the same time observational, tranquil; promotes sensitivity and concentration

No. of participants: one school grade or class

Age: 5th grade and older

Time limit: 5 hours (all day with a lunch break)

Preparation: collect materials, choose an adequate site; study the site well beforehand

Weather conditions: preferably in the dry season

Materials:

Plants
- seeds from the Corotu, fruit of the Royal Palm or Indio Desnudo
- fungus from trees, lichens
- coriander, ginger
- blindfolds (1 per participant)
- mirror (1 per participant)
- a sun made from poster paper
- watering can and a small pot
- glass jar with a label that reads CO2
- jar with sugar
- sheets of paper (according to number of participants)
- pens or pencils

Animal tracks
- postcards
- rope
- nuts (peanuts or hazel nuts – 15 per person)
- animal tracks
- classification and identification books

Soil
- 4 medium gauge strainers
- 1 clear film canister per person
- white bed sheet
- paintbrush
- 4 binoculars (minimum)
- 4 glass containers with covers to carry things (minimum)
- magnifying glasses
- classification and identification books on the flora and fauna
Development:

The day begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 2:00 p.m. After the welcome, divide the group in three. Select three different objects such as branches, rocks, leaves or seeds and distribute them among the children, who have their hands crossed behind their backs. The children identify the objects by touch and are grouped with those who have similar objects. In this way three groups are formed with the same number of participants. Each group participates in a different program during the morning.

During the first two and a half hours the different groups dedicate themselves to a section of the forest’s ecosystem – plants, soil animals or animal tracks. Then there is a the lunch break (1 hour) shared by all three groups. During the remaining 2 hours, each group prepares a special presentation based on what they experienced and learned during the morning activities. The groups then share their presentations with each other. The children decide how they wish to present their work, which could be in the form of a play, a story, a poem, an exhibition or something different. After 60 minutes of preparation time, each group has 10-15 minutes to give their presentation. Then the guide summarizes the most important points of each presentation.

The day ends with the activity SOIL 11, Proof of Erosion, led by one of the guides with the help of two assistants, with the objective of demonstrating how the forest functions as a water reservoir and as a protector against erosion. The group can analyze the situation and draw its own conclusions.

This is a good way to understand the role forests play in conserving water and soil for all living things.

1. Work plan for the morning:

1.1 Plant work group:

The guide gives a sensory introduction to the theme ‘Plants of the Forest’ through a game in which the children are blindfolded and try to identify different plants through touch, smell and taste. Touching allows them to differentiate among the branches of different trees and to discover a special sensation when they feel a tree fungus, ferns or lichens.

This activity requires students to identify the smell of some plants. Be very careful when tasting them because some plants are toxic. To conclude the sensory phase, the students remove the blindfolds and enter the forest and try to find the
plants they touched, smelled or tasted. In addition, point out to them the plants that are used for lumber, medicine, ornamentation, etc.

After this sensory walk, present this living space from a different perspective through the activity TREE 1, Mirror Walk. When the mirror walk is over, the children communicate their impressions of this unusual perspective on the forest. When you ask them if the forest seems boring or monotonous, the majority will soundly deny it, and this will allow you to introduce the theme of the four vegetation levels of a natural forest. The students should enact these vegetation levels: stooped very low (the moss layer), stooped (the grass layer), standing straight (the bush layer) and on tiptoes with arms raised (the tree layer).

The group shouldn’t have difficulties with the identification and location of different plants in the vegetation layers presented. At this point, the guide talks about the differences between a natural forest and a monoculture forest and mentions the importance of dead wood in the forest ecosystem.

After this discussion, the children remain alone for a moment and the guide disappears mysteriously in the forest where he/she has hidden a costume and the necessary items to perform a pantomime about photosynthesis (see TREE 6, Photosynthesis Leprechaun).

In the conversation that follows, the children try to explain photosynthesis in their own words. This is an ideal time to mention the great importance that photosynthesis in plants has for the wellbeing of humans and animals. It also bridges to the theme of growth and we ask ourselves how we can observe the growth of a tree. The group is always impressed by measuring the height of a very big tree (see TREE 15, To Search).

As a relaxing exercise, follow with the activity FOREST AS VITAL LIVING SPACE 13, Owls and Falcons in a forest clearing. If there is no adequate space to perform this game, you can replace it with the activity FOREST AS VITAL LIVING SPACE 14, Memory, where observation skills and memory are put to use.

Next the guide can make the statement: “Traffic noise is pleasing when one is in the forest.” This leads to MOTIVATION 1, Sound Map. The idea is to experience in real life how noises that do not pertain to nature destroy the harmony of a
natural environment. Generally, this game calms the group and improves their attention. This is necessary to continue with the following activity, which involves the tactile recognition of a tree (see TREE 11, Meeting a Tree).

Now each student should find a specific tree and make a safe and comfortable place to stand with their eyes closed. Continue with the following activity in which “A Tree Fantasy” is performed. It deals with a kind of meditation, which allows the morning program to end in a pleasant manner (see TREE 12, The Year Goes By, The Tree Remains). After all these activities, the group goes to lunch.

1.2 Soil animals work group:

The guide says, “All the rocks (leaves or seeds) over here, please!” and has the students sit in a circle. Now the guide introduces himself/herself again but in more detail. The guide asks each of the children to introduce themselves to the group and to say something about themselves. This opens up communication within the group, and the children or young people can overcome their shyness in front of the guide. After the presentations, begin with a sensory activity named SOIL 2, Barefoot Caterpillar, in which the children must remove their shoes and blindfold their eyes in order to feel and experience the forest soil.

To conclude the activity and to comment on the experience, someone will mention the presence of animals in the soil. This will be the cue to move on to the following activity, SOIL 4, Following the Tracks of Soil Animals.

The guide asks which animals or living things exist in the soil. Generally, the children will not only mention the animals but also the bacteria and fungus that chose the soil as their living space. This activity is very entertaining to the children and puts into practice several of their senses. To develop the activity, always remind the children that “We only borrow them,” and that the group will return all creatures to their comfortable living space.

Later continue with the physical exercise in the chapter MOTIVATION 6, Flea – Bird – Spider. Finally, the children collect a fistful of forest soil to ‘smell the life’ that exists in the soil.

After a short recess, the children will find a leaf in which the decomposition process is so advanced that only the skeleton remains (see SOIL 5, Fallen Leaves). When each one has a leaf, they all sit on the ground and continue with the
activity **SOIL 6**, Soil Staircase. The guide explains the decomposition cycle of the leaves: formation of humus, nutrients for the plant and formation of new leaves.

The children’s questions are always incorporated into the conversation. That way the children can present their prior knowledge about the decomposition cycle. For example, they may ask, “What is the name of the soil that contains all these nutrients?” Then you can talk about the worms as ‘bosses of the forest soil.’

Before concluding with the ‘soil staircase,’ the topic of trash should be discussed. What else do we find in the forest that is not part of it? Once this problem is analyzed, the children will begin to understand that the little animals and organisms cannot decompose such materials as cans, bottles, motor oil, etc., and that they could also die because of them. Then, they may ask, “What can we do?” Suggest the possibility of avoiding the creation of trash and the importance of recycling it.

To end the morning in the best way possible, everyone lies face up on sheets or mats and looks upward to the treetops and reflects on what would happen if the soil animals went on strike and the fallen leaves accumulated. After this final activity, the children go to lunch.

1.3 Animal tracks work group:

The children sit on the grass and the guide responsible for the group introduces himself/herself and talks about the work plan for the morning. With the idea of creating a comfortable environment, the guide asks each student to introduce him or herself briefly.

When the children hear that their theme is the forest animals, many will expect to meet up with several large and uncommon animals. For this reason, it is very important from the beginning to direct the students’ interest toward the tracks of forest animals. Only in this way will you avoid disillusion. You can capture the group’s attention and concentration if you inform them that the search for signs and tracks is the key to detect an animal’s presence. Since the principal theme is signs and tracks, you will have to identify what they understand by signs and tracks. Nearly all groups mention paw prints first, and few know that there are other signs and tracks such as bite marks on the trees, droppings, parts of animals such as feathers, horns, skulls and houses such as nests, caves or burrows. For this reason, it is necessary to clarify this point before beginning the walk otherwise, the search will be very frustrating for everyone (see **THE FOREST AS VITAL**...
LIVING SPACE 2, Following the Signs and Tracks of Animals). The big signs and tracks are discussed in place, and the small ones are collected and taken to the base camp to discuss their origin.

During the walk you can play THE FOREST AS VITAL LIVING SPACE 5, Silent Pursuit. This game promotes concentration and can be a good way to start the search for signs and tracks.

Continue with the activity BEGINNING 3, Who Am I? Once all the animals and plants on the post cards have been identified, the children form a circle and present the plant or the animal on the card that they received. Then a string of yarn is passed from child to child to represent the interdependence that exists between animals and plants within the forest (see THE FOREST AS VITAL LIVING SPACE 4, Everyone Depends on One Another). Use animals that were talked about during the preceding activities. In this way, the children will already know a lot about the interdependencies of the animals. To demonstrate the interdependence of all the flora and fauna in the forest ecosystem, the students gently pull the yarn up and down. Later they will offer some reflections about the natural changes in an ecosystem. This game only reflects a limited section of the forest ecosystem and the complexity that exists within it. This game is fun and entertaining to the children.

To conclude, analyze the consequences of human intervention in the ecosystem and its relationship to the extinction of some species. After this final activity, the children go to lunch.

2. Work plan for the afternoon:

After lunch and a recess, the groups form again to prepare their presentations. It is important to have a variety of materials such as paint for handicrafts and disguises, even though it is possible to have a good presentation with fewer materials.
2.1 Suggested contents for boxes of materials:

Paint and craft box:
- watercolors with brushes
- crayons, fine and thick markers
- colored pencils
- sheets of paper in different colors
- glue and adhesive tape
- scissors
- pencil sharpeners
- erasers
- poster paper
- large rolls of newspaper
- boards to glue leaves onto

Theater box (materials for disguises):
- hats
- various lengths of fabrics
- masks
- old clothes and costumes
- stage makeup
- items such as glasses, fake noses, wigs, mustaches, musical instruments and noisemakers

2.2 Presentation preparation:

With their own ideas and proposals, the children prepare a presentation that reflects what they saw during the morning. In this way, all the children will witness activities that other groups performed during the morning. The presentations not only fulfill this objective, they also offer a time for the children or young people to develop their creativity. It is also a good opportunity for them to practice cooperation and democratic behavior within the group. The presentation of something created and prepared, for example, a play, reinforces the children’s self-esteem.

2.3 Instructions for the presentation:

For a good presentation, the guide should pay attention to the children’s ideas and proposals, and should not impose his/her own ideas. The role of the guide is to motivate the group.
Encourage each child to contribute his or her unique ideas to the presentation. The guide must not exercise undue influence. This is a complex task because many children are not accustomed to working independently.

Generally, the group needs time to get used to the idea of having to create something. Once they have passed this step, then the joint reflection on the morning activities and themes begins. One member of the group should take notes of all the ideas and proposals so their feasibility can be discussed. Although oftentimes not all the ideas can be accomplished, the possibility remains of combining them. For example, some students will want to write a story; others to act out a play. To solve the problem they can act out the story.

Once the presentation is defined, the students begin the preparation. They look for the necessary items in the theater and craft boxes. With lots of fun and energy, they make rhymes, they practice, they paint and they build. Generally, the shyest children become enthusiastic with the paints, crafts and disguises and decide to participate also in the preparation.

During this phase, the guide must be attentive in order not to lose the central message of each presentation, that is the activities experienced during the morning.

The guide should be satisfied if the initial chaos is overcome gradually and the groups work well from the formulation of the initial idea to the actual performance. However, there will be groups that need precise instructions so they can coordinate and accomplish their ideas.

2.4 Presentation:

When all the preparation is done, the presentations can begin. An open space in the forest and the grace of the actors create an ideal environment to complete this activity.

The presentations begin with a brief introduction by one of the guides who welcomes all of the participants. The order of the presentations is not important and generally this is decided at the last moment. It is practically impossible to describe the development of a presentation because each group is unique and it is surprising to see all of the children’s creativity. Sometimes, what was learned is not very apparent in the work, but the children have lots of fun and what is most important is that they feel proud of their work.
2.5 Examples of presentations:

Here are a few examples to demonstrate the great variety of ideas presented by children from around the world.

2.5.1 Plant work group:

- Exhibition of drawings of various plant species and the four vegetation layers of the forest.
- A game of dice with different tasks and questions about the morning theme.
- A contest with questions and answers about the morning theme.
- Some plays about:
  - The origin and decomposition of plants.
  - Plant species of the forest, their needs and locations (For example, students disguised as palms, espaves or cuipos complain about a tree that wants to grow next to them, fearing that it may take up all the sunlight. The lonely tree decides to grow near the Corotú).
  - The interaction between animals and plants, with the idea of representing carbon dioxide and oxygen gases using balls of different colors, and throwing them from an animal to a plant and vice versa (for this they must have analyzed the process of photosynthesis during the morning).
  - A small child and his/her grandfather walk in the forest and observe the various plants that are represented by other students. The child insists on wanting to have one of them, but the grandfather explains that they are in a protected area and why it is necessary for all the plants to remain in their natural habitat. After a moment, the child and grandfather appear on the scene again. Now the child is an adult and walks with the old and stooped grandfather through the woods. They recognize the place where they were so many years before and talk of the changes... “Look how big this tree has grown, while this old tree has fallen.”
  - For the theme of trash in the forest, a small forest of espave trees enacted by children covered with branches, enjoys life; there are also some animals played by the children. All of a sudden a car full of tourists enters the forest and the trees begin to cough. The tourists have a picnic; leave their trash and go.
• Writing and presentation of the story, “A Little Tree.” In this story, a tree comes to life and discovers the forest. In the beginning, when it is only a seed, a squirrel hides it in a hole in a dead trunk and forgets about it. Then the seed starts to germinate and begins a pilgrimage because it wants to find the best spot in the forest to grow.

2.5.2 Animal tracks work group:
- Representation of the web of interdependence through dramatization. The children disguise themselves and demonstrate how each of them is dependent on the others.
- The group imitates the sounds and typical behavior of some animals, and the audience tries to guess them.
- The children create and act out a story, for example the inspection routes and vigilance that a park ranger performs during the first hours of the morning.
- Each animal recounts its life in the forest and shows its prints.
- A professor from the ‘University of Natural Beauty’ returns from an expedition through the forest and recounts his or her observations to the students.
- The students organize an exhibition of drawings with the tracks they saw during the morning hike.
- The group prepares a forest fashion show with skins and feathers.
- The students present a television program with information on what they observed, for example, the name of the program could be ‘The Last Agouti.’

2.5.3 Soil animals work group:
- Exhibition of the soil animals and the composition of the soil.
- Drawing of the food cycle using leaves at different stages of decomposition.
- Dramatizations:
  - On the symbiotic relationship between plants and soil.
  - The soil animals meet in the forest and cook a meal in a big pot. The ‘ferns’ that come from the trees were a special treat for everyone; while the plastic trash gave everyone terrible stomach pains.
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- Guessing game to present different soil animals and the decomposition process.
- Preparation of a ‘sensory path’ for the feet – composed of different types of soils.
- The group creates a story that incorporates some animal signs. Each time a sign is mentioned, such as the feather of a specific bird, that feather is presented.

Suggestions:

- A single day of adventure in the forest cannot change the behavior of a child or an adolescent with respect to a future life in harmony with nature. It is probable that in the bus on the way home, the children will take out their walkmans … but in spite of it all, the enthusiasm of the children, their enlightened look when they see a dragonfly emerge from its cocoon for the first time, or when they proudly hold a spider in their hands despite the feeling of repulsion they had a few hours before, shows that a day of adventure in the forest is a good way to transmit to future generations the beauty and fascination of nature. We conclude with the following expression, “You love and respect only what you know. What you love and respect, you protect.”
Meditation on Forest Sounds

Recognizing Plants by Smells and Tastes