

Take it Outside! Games, Tips and Tricks for Teaching Outdoors

Games! (Concepts covered are in **BOLD**)

- **Animal Catchers:** Players form a line shoulder-to-shoulder at one end of playing field or gym. (Large group could have lines at each end.) Each player chooses a particular species to be and takes a minute to think about it or look at a picture. The “Catcher” in the center of playing field calls out a particular adaptation (Animals with a bad smell; good vision; long running legs; bright colors, etc.) and any player with that characteristic must run across field to opposite end while Catcher tries to tag them. Tagged animals become additional “Trees.” Trees can tag where they stand, but are “rooted” into the ground and can’t move their feet. For young children, leader may want to be the caller & let “catchers” concentrate on catching. **Animal classification and adaptations**
Supplies needed: game cones
- **Peshua:** Peshua is a Native American word for Mountain Lion. In this game, half the players are trees and the other half is white-tailed deer. In the middle of the playing area lay bandannas on the ground. One per deer, this represents the deer’s tail. Explain that deer use their tails as a warning to others in the herd that danger is near. Have the deer turn their backs on the trees. Hide a small piece of masking tape on one of the trees. This represents a mountain lion. The tape has to be visible and not hidden in anything. The deer then have to look for the “peshua”. They cannot touch the trees. When the first deer finds it, s/he has to grab a tail and run to the deer side. The other deer need to grab a tail as well. The deer who saw the peshua first has to tell you where they saw it to count. Slowly remove tails after each round. If a deer does not have a tail, they become a tree. **Native American history, predator/prey, animal communication, camouflage**
Supplies needed: Bag of “Tails” (fabric scraps, bandanas, etc.), roll of natural colored masking tape
- **Lemonade:** Players form two teams. One team thinks of the initials of a favorite local animal. The other team has to guess the animal the initials represent. Each team takes steps forward toward each other, one step per syllable, calling out the following chant: Here we come/where from/New York/What’s your trade?/ Lemonade/ What’s your number/Cucumber/What’s your initial? (Give initials of a bird, tree, etc. Set category in advance.)/ At a correct guess, the guessing team chases the other team back to their boundary. Any children tagged while running away goes to the guessing team. Teams switch roles. **Animal names/classification**
Supplies needed: game cones
- **Fox and Rabbit (best done in the woods):** IMPORTANT: scout out a game area ahead of time. Look for hazards like poison ivy or thorns. One “Fox” stands in one spot, eyes closed, and counts to twenty. Fox cannot move from that spot. “Rabbits” (all other players) scatter and hide while Fox counts. Rabbits must have one eye on the fox at all times during the game. Fox opens eyes and attempts to see as many Rabbits as possible

– pointing them out by name or clothing. When Fox can see no more Rabbits, Fox closes eyes and counts to 15. Rabbits must move at least 10 steps closer to Fox and hide again. Repeat until only one Rabbit remains unfound. Relate to the fact that “Freezing” is a behavioral adaptation animals use to escape notice by a predator. **Predator/prey relationships, camouflage, prey animal adaptations**

- **Cougar Needs a Cave:** Each player decides on an animal and the shelter needed. All but one of the player scatters over the area, choosing spots by trees or other landmarks. “It” goes from person to person saying something like “Squirrel needs a shelter, can I have your tree?” or “Beetle needs a shelter, can I have your log?” etc. Players answer, “I’m a frog; you can’t use my pond. (etc.) Try my next-door neighbor.” As the animal goes from one to the other, players can trade places behind his/her back, and the animal tries to slip into a vacant spot. If the animal is having no luck, she/he can call “All change”. When Animal gets a spot, the odd person out becomes the next animal. **Habitats, animal needs**

Supplies needed: several place holders (cones, hula hoops, trees, etc.)

- **Tree Lifecycle Yoga:** Each player needs enough room to move within their own space. Have you ever noticed the seeds that fall from trees and twirl like helicopters? Those are Maple seeds. We are going to time travel today and go through one hundred years in just a few minutes. Twirl in place 2x. We start out as seeds just landed on the forest floor: squat down on the ground, wrap arms around legs. We’ve landed in good soil and leaves are falling covering us up for the winter. We’re going to wiggle down into the soil for a long nap: wiggle down as far as you can go. It’s now spring and the sun is warming us: wiggle your toes, those are your roots shooting out to anchor you to the soil, wiggle more and send up your first two leaves on a tiny stem toward the sun: slowly stand up with arms above head and palms out as leaves. We are growing and becoming a seedling, then a sapling then a young Maple tree: stretch out arms, wiggle fingers to indicate new leaves. We are very flexible, we bend with the wind: with arms out, bend and stretch. We are growing and growing: rise up on tip toes or do a little hop to show growth. We are now a mature maple tree and have made our own seeds: pretend to drop seeds from fingers. Show that we are growing more: hop or up on toes. Now we are one of the larger trees in the forest, but we are not so flexible as before. Here comes a wind storm: bend at the waist with arms outstretched, make some creaking noises as you bend. A sudden gust has broken a limb off our tree: drop one arm. We are still a living tree continuing to grow, making our own food, and creating millions of seeds: little hop or up on toes, drop seeds from hand. We are now one of the biggest and oldest trees in the forest, we don’t bend very much, we have lost more limbs and now a big storm has arrived: move stiffly from side to side with lots of creaking noises, drop remaining arm. We now have no more limbs, we cannot make food anymore. A few years go by and another big storm comes: arms at sides, wind noises and “timber!”: either lie on ground or hold both arms out to the sides. We are now a fallen log, no longer living, but we are home to many animals. Mushrooms and insects help us

decompose and put nutrients back into the soil: wiggle as you make yourself flatter and flatter. Now look up, here comes a new Maple seed falling from a tree and twirling down, down, down to land where we have fallen: point to the sky, then twirl you hand and slowly bring it down to land at your middle. The seed has landed and a whole new tree will grow in the spring. **Tree lifecycle, habitat**

Tips:

- Think **safety and comfort**. Take a hike/outing bag. Include the following items (plus any that help you):
 - First Aid kit, TP, props or artifacts, bandana, attention grabber (whistle, duck call, etc.)
- Hike/outing rules: Always set up rules so children know what is expected of them. This keeps them safe, but also gives them the power to show respect and discipline to stay with the team. Sample hike rules:
 - Follow the leader (you) at all times
 - Stay with the group, so you don't fall behind
 - If you see something cool, point it out but don't take it from nature
 - Optional rule: "I reserve the right to make up a new rule if I need to" 😊
- Remember, kids know that YOU are their way back to familiar territory. They aren't going to scatter like bugs as soon as you go out the door.
- Things that you take for granted may be new and fascinating to a student with little experience in nature. Those worms on the sidewalk after a rain, the way the soil heaves after a frost, a random puddle, even a dandelion in a crack are all interesting opportunities for discovery!

Tricks:

- Use a child's natural energy to help them focus:
 - Walk so fast, they can't walk and talk at same time. Don't forget to stop so they can catch up...
 - "Silent walk" to help them use their ears. There's a whole new world past our voices and footsteps
 - Use a "talking stick, talking frog, etc." Only the student holding the item can speak.
 - Look behind you often to make sure everyone is with you. If your group is splintering into two groups, slow down or make a stop and let the second group catch up.

Comfort trick for you: dress for the weather. If you are comfortable, you are confident in leading. Plenty of layers and hat/gloves in the winter, cool clothes in heat, all help you lead well

Comfort tricks for children: check what they are wearing. If they aren't properly dressed or have inappropriate footwear, keep it in mind and adjust your outing if necessary.

- Every time you stop, make sure the sun is in your face. If the sun is glaring at you, it will be at the children's backs. They can listen and explore with you without squinting or burning.
- **"Bandana trick:"** along the way (without children seeing if possible), collect 3-5 natural items. Stop and tell children you have a mission for them. Instruct them to make a circle and turn their backs to you. Place your mystery items on the ground, cover with the bandana. Tell students you have mystery objects under the bandana, and their mission is to memorize and find these items. Remove bandana, count to 10, cover again and let them loose.
- **Discovery Bag:** Place natural items in a pouch or bag. Let a child reach in and touch an item, discussing what they feel. Let the child remove the item and all children see. Was it what they expected? What is it? What is it for?
- **Listening – Hands up:** Children each make fists, put hands in the air, close their eyes, and listen. Each time they hear a nature (non-people) sound they put a finger up. Continue until you feel enough time has passed. Have campers share what they heard.
- **String Hike:** See things from a smaller perspective. Lay out a length of string (1 per student). Children crawl along their string, looking at everything through a magnifier. Can pair up and let students give each other a tour of their strings
- **Micro Hike variation:** Use a hula hoop as the area to explore with magnifiers.
- **Sound / Smell Match:** Pass out sets of film canisters set up for sound or smell matching. Let students find their "mate". Works for almost all animal categories. Relate this to the different adaptations animals have for communicating with each other, finding mates, bonding parent and child, keeping groups (like ants in an anthill) cohesive.
- **Camera:** Children are in pairs: 1 is the camera, 1 is the photographer. Camera closes its eyes and carefully steered and positioned by the photographer to take pictures. Photographer takes a picture by squeezing the camera's shoulders. Camera opens his/her eyes for just a second and mentally records what he/she sees. Take about 3 – 5 pictures, then "develop" the film by having camera describe what he/she saw. Trade places.