

Little Ones Learn about Nature

Ann Hightower, The Branch School (www.ocblog.thebranchschool.org)

Your shopping list for Outdoor Classroom

- Vegetable beds
- Wildscape with pond and “wilder” scape behind fence
- Wildflower meadow and bioswale
- Pocket prairie
- Nestboxes and purple martin colony house, bird feeders & birdbath
- Compost heaps, composter & worm bin
- Indoor SunLighter carts

Pond Activities

Exploring in the water

Learn to sit cross-legged first

Plastic-cup dippers into plastic tubs

Practice contributing to common resource (tub) and looking at what others find

Watching life around the pond

Look for dragonflies

Look for swimming insects

Look for water-walkers

What can they learn about what they find

Value of algae as food for everybody else

Difference between a fish and a tadpole

How small living things can be

What a wide range of creatures live in water

Using a microscope

Using a QX5 with little ones

First look at something they can see with their eyes

Draw a dot the size of the actual object on a sheet of paper

Draw a dot 200x bigger (use squares to help!)

THEN look at a microorganism out of the pond.

Birdwatching with little ones

3 & 4 year olds can learn to mimic all our common birds

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: excellent source of expertise

Learn calls of birds in school neighborhood from their website

Celebrate Urban Birds

Project FeederWatch

Take little ones birdwatching

Look through a bird guide

Houston Audubon Society Birdathon participation

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/> -- Cornell Lab of Ornithology

<http://www.houstonaudubon.org> – Houston Audubon Society

Caterpillars and butterflies

Starbucks caterpillar habitat for upclose, safe viewing

- Count features on the caterpillar: stripes, toes, eyes, horns
- Draw picture of caterpillar
- Talk about what and how caterpillar eats
- Follow up with garden scavenger hunt for more caterpillars
- Best resource: Butterflies of Houston by Tvetens

Mexican milkweeds to raise caterpillars

- Needs at least half a dozen
- Expect them to regrow completely twice/year

Penta, lantana, sage, coneflower, porterweed to feed migrating butterflies

– Constant bloom needed March-November

Your own Cockrell Butterfly Center

- Green beans grow long-tailed skippers
- Dill or fennel grow black swallowtails
- Passionflowers grow Gulf fritillaries
- Cassias and candlestick shrubs grow sulfurs
- Spicebush or camphor trees grow spicebush swallowtails
- Citrus trees grow giant swallowtails

Looking for ladybugs

See what kind by using flash cards made by older children for their younger buddies

Challenging for 1st graders to copy pattern

Useful for both givers and receivers to learn the richness of “ladybug” community

Vegetable gardening

- Plant vegetables the kids will want to sample
beans in August & March, peas in December
- Plant an herb garden for the kids to feel & smell
basil in August & March
parsley, dill and cilantro in December
rosemary, Mexican mint marigold as perennials
- Teach them to weed, and learn plant parts from their weeding
this is particular fun if you have oaks and can pull oak saplings with the acorn attached
- Scavenger hunts for leaf shapes or flower colors