

NIGHT HIKE

Activity 9

AGE LEVEL = 5 and up
DURATION = 30-60 min.
LEARNING STATION = Outdoors
RELATED ACTIVITIES = ← Hoo Gives a Hoot
←→ Star Fantasies



WHEN =



UNDERSTANDING: Spending time outdoors at night helps overcome fears associated with darkness, especially when you rely on senses other than sight to observe nature at night.

SPECIAL NOTE: There should be at least one adult for every 12 children, preferably two.

MATERIALS:

- Flashlight with red filter
- Colored crayons
- White scratch paper
- Rope, knotted at 2 to 2.5 foot intervals

PREPARATION: Choose a site that is away from city or street lights to preserve the participants' night vision. If possible, visit the site during the day and night. Choose several trees in the same area and squeeze onion juice at the base of the trees and on their trunks at about nose height.

LESSON:

Warm-up: Set the proper mood. Reflect an inner calmness, speaking as quietly as you can. Children usually catch on quickly that they should do the same. Move the group outside and pass out one crayon and a small piece of paper to each child. Have them write down their names and guess the crayon's color. Have them return the crayons and put the pieces of paper in their pockets.

After everyone has settled down, ask (in a quiet voice) "How many people are afraid of the night?" "Do you ever venture outside at night where there are no lights?" Respond openly to them and interject your own fears. Depict a person with fears, but one who can still enjoy the night. Explain that the night hike will test their senses and help them to overcome their fears.

Activity: Have each child hold on to a knotted section of the rope. If two adults are present, have one walk at the front and one at the end. Bring only one flashlight and use it only for emergencies. Note that it takes 15 minutes for our eyes to adjust enough to walk about at night and 45 minutes for full night vision. Explain that our night vision is as good as that of lynx or deer, and better than rabbits. However, one bright flash of light ruins it and means several minutes of readjustment. Listen for nocturnal (night active) animals such as bats, owls, insects, deer, mice, raccoons and flying squirrels. Also have the children listen for less obvious noises like creaking trees, running water and leaves crunching.

Odors are often more apparent at night. Explain that the cold, heavy night air usually holds strong odors closer to the ground. Have the children investigate with their noses near the trees doused with onion juice. Have them compare the strength of the smell at the base of the trees with the smell higher up on the bark. Many small mammals are most active at night because their odors are confined to a small area. Predators are less likely to discover them.

Wrap-up: End your hike by choosing a site for each child to sit alone for 10 minutes and remain quite to see or hear animals and other night sounds. Then gather in a circle and have the children share their discoveries. Finish the lesson outside by having the children sit in a circle and close or cover one eye. Light the candle and instruct them to stare at its flame with their opened eye. Recap the night's activities or share a personal experience as they meditate. After two or three minutes, blow out the candle and have the children compare the sight in their closed and opened eyes. The flame from the candle has ruined the night vision of the open eye, but the closed eye's night vision is maintained. The difference is dramatic and the children will often tell you so.

Once inside, have the children check their paper to see if they guessed their color correctly.

OPTIONS AND FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:

1. You may need to adjust the time spent alone to the comfort level of the children, either making it shorter or longer.
2. Have children explore the night sky after giving a brief introductory talk on stars, constellations, legends and myths. (see Activity 34)
3. To locate animals at night you can use the flashlight without its red filter to scan open fields for shining eyes. Hold the flashlight near your eyes. This activity is most successful in the spring with insects and frogs, but you may get lucky and pick up a deer, raccoon or porcupine.