



THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMANE EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 260
SURRY, MAINE 04684
207.667.1025
info@HumaneEducation.org
www.HumaneEducation.org

AMAZING NATURE

Grades: 1 through 6

Time: 30-60 minutes

Materials: Realia examples (see below); photos, facts about nature; amazing nature-type books; tape measures; props needed for nature examples (compass, seeds, etc.)

Relevant Subjects: Science and Language Arts

Pertinent Information: This activity is designed to inspire wonder about the different types of nature around us and all over the world. There are three main types of examples used in this activity:

- **Realia examples:** Sample objects which can actually be brought to the presentation for the audience to explore using their five senses. (See examples below.)
- **Nature Thought of It First examples:** Concepts, tools & techniques that people have adapted from those found in nature. When possible, it's more effective to bring samples of both the "human" and "nature" versions, like bedstraw & Velcro or a snake fang (from road kill) & a syringe (minus the needle). (See examples below.)
- **Amazing Nature examples:** "Cool" facts and information about nature. This could include anything from interesting facts about unique creatures and characteristics, to examples dealing with animal emotions, to comparisons of how people do things and how nature does things (raising a family, building a home, protecting self, playing, etc.). This is also an excellent opportunity to focus on the amazing nature we can find in our own backyards & communities. For this section, it is especially important to have visuals, and, when appropriate, to provide "real" experiences for the audience (such as having them make a human chain to illustrate the length/height of something).

1. Lead students in a visualization: "We're going to explore some of the amazing things about nature today." Have students close their eyes and picture themselves somewhere in nature that they've been before: a park, someone's yard, the beach, etc. "Look around in your mind's eye and find something you think is really interesting: it could be something you see, something you hear, feel, or smell. Once you've found that

interesting something, open your eyes.” Give students a chance to share their examples.

2. Say: “I have discovered so many amazing things about nature that I wanted to share some of them with you today.” Share class/age-appropriate examples of Amazing Nature. For example:

Amazing Realia examples:

- Owl pellets (contain coughed up animal bones, etc.)
- Deer antlers (fastest growing animal tissue)
- Shark tooth (modified scales, new ones grow as old ones break off, lots of rows, etc.)
- Ostrich egg (biggest bird egg, other facts about this flightless bird)
- Sequoia (or other) small cones (tie in with size of adult trees)
- Feather (interlocking barbs, hollow shaft, etc.)
- Venus flytrap plant (carnivorous plant)
- Mushroom (plants that don’t manufacture chlorophyll, fast growing, can get huge, some are edible)

Nature Thought of It First examples:

- Bedstraw plants (Velcro)
- Venomous snake fangs (hypodermic needles)
- Bird navigation (compasses, star charts, etc.)
- Use of tools (chimpanzees, otters, Egyptian vulture, etc.)
- Camouflage (various examples from nature)

Other Amazing Examples:

- Trees: [Make a partial human circle to show how big around larger trees get (like the 80+ foot diameter giant sequoias) – also talk about the coast redwood, which grows to be just over 360 feet tall (the tallest living thing on land).]
- Blue whales: [They grow to be over 100 feet long (go outside and make a human chain that long).]
- Elephants: [Talk about their family groups, emotional lives, their mourning of death, etc.]
- Coelacanth: [Share photos of this example of an “extinct” living fossil (rediscovered in 1938, etc.).]
- Poison arrow frog: [Most poisonous living animal, some are the size of a quarter, many get their poison from the food they ingest.]
- Giant Spider Crab: [World’s largest crab, legs up to 18 feet long]
- Geckos: [Clean their eyes by licking them, unique toes w/ hooks/suction cups, tails that break off, etc.]

3. Share ways that students who want to find out more about amazing nature can do so (resources, nature hikes, Audubon workshops, etc.).

Extensions:

1. Pass out books containing amazing nature facts and have small groups look through and choose a couple of examples to share with the entire class.

2. Have the group go outside on school grounds and spend 10-15 silent minutes using their five senses to absorb nature. Weather permitting, stay outside and share examples of what they discovered.

3. What are our most amazing qualities as humans? Have students create a list. Some will probably mention physical attributes, intelligence, etc. Encourage them to think about qualities like generosity, courage, reverence, cooperation, appreciation for beauty, kindness, etc.

Activity by Marsha Rakestraw (HECP Graduate)