



INSTITUTE FOR  
HUMANE EDUCATION

# AMAZING NATURE

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## PURPOSE

This activity uses hands-on examples and curiosity-inspiring facts to spark wonder about the natural world.

## GRADES

1-6

## TIME

30-60 minutes

## MATERIALS

- sample objects from nature; nature photos
- facts about nature; books focused on "amazing" nature facts
- tape measures; props needed for your specific examples (compass, seeds, etc.)

## SUBJECT AREAS

Language Arts and Science

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Common Core for grades 1-3: <http://bit.ly/1eBvWC8>

Common Core for grades 4-6: <http://bit.ly/18SGYwL>

## PERTINENT INFORMATION AND PREPARATION

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:

- **Sample objects from nature:** Sample objects which can actually be brought to the presentation for students to explore using their 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:** Fascinating facts and information about nature. This could include interesting facts about unique creatures and characteristics, to examples dealing with animal emotions, to comparisons of how people do things and how nature or other species do 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).

## RELATED RESOURCES

### Videos

**Natures Great Events (BBC)**  
<http://bbc.in/TjJx2R>

**Planet Earth series**  
<http://bit.ly/17WRi5L>

### Books

*Animal Life: Secrets of the Animal World Revealed*  
 by DK Publishing (2011)

*Biomimicry: Inventions Inspired by Nature*  
 by Dora Lee (2011)

*National Geographic Kids Ultimate Weird But True: 1,000 Wild & Wacky Facts and Photos*  
 by Nat Geo (2011)

*Nature's World Records*  
 by John R. Quinn (1997)

*Sharing Nature with Children*  
 by Joseph Cornell (1998)

*World's Weirdest Animals*  
 by Matt Roper (2011)

## PROCEDURE

1. Let students know that you'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, a garden, etc. Tell them: "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. Share with students that you have discovered so many amazing things about nature that you want to share some of them today. Share class/age-appropriate examples of amazing nature. For example:

### Objects from nature 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, Ostriches are flightless birds, etc.)
- 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 and other plants with burrs (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)
- Various ways of flying (soaring, flapping, etc.)

### 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]

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 and observe nature. Weather permitting, stay outside and share examples of what they discovered.
3. Ask students to create a list of our most amazing qualities as humans. Some will probably mention physical attributes, intelligence, etc. Encourage them to think about qualities like generosity, courage, reverence, cooperation, appreciation for beauty, kindness, etc.
4. Follow up with some of our other reverence-building humane education activities in our Resource Center.