

Nature Walk

"Flowers are words that even a baby can understand."

~Arthur C. Coxe



The nature that surrounds us is filled with objects that tickle our senses. The buzzing of a bee, the scent of a flower, and the vision of a majestic tree all need words to describe them. Reading with your very young child need not only mean sitting together with a book. Experience the "living curriculum" right outside your front door and share the beautiful world of words with your child.

Take a walk outside with your baby. Regardless of your environment (suburb or rural setting)*, notice the life that surrounds you. Take baby's hand and point to the various objects that you see. As your little one touches the petals of a flower or points to a taxicab, say the name of the object. You can encourage a toddler to take the lead and point out what he or she notices. Clearly name the object and encourage your youngster to echo your words.

A wonderful way to build upon your child's vocabulary base is to elaborate upon your identifications. For example, if your toddler points to a plane flying overhead say, "Airplane." After he says, or attempts to say, the word continue the conversation with, "That airplane is flying high in the sky! It looks like it's touching the clouds!" Any conversation will do! The purpose is to communicate with your little one using descriptive words and voice inflections.

These types of experiences become the foundation for literacy, which is verbal communication. Learning to read is easier for a child who has a solid vocabulary base and effective conversational skills. Quite possibly, the biggest bonus of a nature walk will be the quality time you spend with your child in this great, big, wonderful world!

*If you'd like to experience nature at its best, visit a local park. You can locate some of the best national parks in your area by going to <http://www.nps.gov/parks.html>. Input your zip code and the National Parks Service search engine will direct you to the park(s) closest to you.