

Identifying Local Flora and Fauna

By exploring, investigating, and recording the different types of plants (flora) and animals (fauna) in a local outdoor area, students build a connection to place and a sense of the diversity of life. It is empowering to be able to name the things around you and can give students a sense of ownership of the natural area, in addition to introducing them the tools of field science, like taxonomic keys and magnifying glasses.

GRADES: All

INTENDED OUTCOMES: Head, Feet

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

- Field guides to help identify local plants and animals
- Paper, markers, pens, clipboards, cameras

Suggested steps and/or focus for each grade level*:

ECE-KINDERGARDEN:

- Introduce young students to the concepts later used in more complex and specific species identification by discussing what makes one animal or plant special. How do we know that a squirrel is a squirrel and not a cat, or a sunflower is not a pine tree.
- Explore the schoolyard or a nearby park with the specific focus of recording the different plants and/or animals that you find there. You can do this as a whole class through drawing or photos. Using common names like “rabbit” are fine (vs. Mountain Cottontail)!

FIRST GRADE:

- To expand on the activity above, try turning your records of the different local species into a field guide by having each student make their own drawings and binding them together into a book. Show them real field guides as examples. (See our “Make a Field Guide” activity for more details!)
- Help students to annotate drawings. This encourages them to be specific about what makes one organism unique, develops language skills, and fosters attention to detail, especially in scientific inquiry.
- Try asking questions like, “How many petals does the flower have?” or, “How many inches tall do you think the animal is?”

2nd GRADE:

- As students’ manual dexterity and self-regulation improves, you can add new techniques to their scientific investigation skills, like drying plants for scientific record. You can press flowers in a specialized press or using many sheets of absorbant paper (like newsprint) and heavy stacks of books. Discuss with students when it is appropriate to pick plants and when/where it is not. You

can also set guidelines for minimizing impact such as, “Only take a leaf if there are seven or more on the plant,” etc.

3rd – 5th GRADES:

- In addition to the suggestions above, look for signs of wildlife such as scat, tracks, feathers, and fur.
- Begin to expand your search beyond the schoolyard to local parks and other natural areas.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL:

- Investigate, explore and record the different types of plants and animals in a variety of local outdoor areas within the county and the Front Range. Discuss how these plants and animals are uniquely adapted to their habitats through the process of evolution.

*For more detail on the grade-level focus for natural and social concepts and sense of place, please refer to the Guidelines



TIPS AND TRICKS:

- Field guides for identifying plants and animals come in many forms - look for ones that are more photo or drawing based for younger students. Older students can learn to utilize taxonomic keys, which ask detailed, branching questions to help identify and distinguish the exact species.



Relevant Standards

**SC09-GR.P-S.2-GLE2, SC09-GR.K-S.2-GLE1
SC09-GR.6-S.2-GLE.1, SC09-GR.7-S.2-GLE.1**