

An Exploring Michigan Walk*

* This activity is adapted with permission from the "Discovery Walk: For Seeing the Land and Watershed" in *The Walk: Taking Your Youth Outdoors*, by Michigan 4-H Youth Development. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Extension. 2000.

OBJECTIVES:

- By taking an Exploring Michigan Walk, you will:
 - Explore one part of your everyday natural environment.
 - Work with an adult to identify some of the natural features of your environment.
 - Think about what features of the site you've explored that you'd like to explore further or learn more about, and make a plan for doing so.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

- Observing
- Gathering information
- Identifying patterns
- Thinking critically
- Keeping records

MATERIALS:

- Clothes appropriate for the weather and the terrain you'll be exploring (such as comfortable, sturdy shoes that tie, socks, long pants, a hat)
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Notepad or paper (one per person)
- Pencil or pen (one per person)
- Camera (optional)
- Plan It: Your Personal Guide to Making a Plan and Carrying It Out (optional; one per person)

AUDIENCE:

- Ages 5 (with adult help) and up

TIME:

- At least 60 minutes

SETTING:

Anywhere outdoors that is safe to walk and explore, such as a city, township, county or state park; a school grounds; an urban "river walk"; a golf course; a local farm or nature area; a fairgrounds; a small pond, creek edge or beachfront; a vacant lot; a community center; a cemetery; your neighborhood; your own backyard

PROCEDURE:

1. Find a small group of kids and an adult buddy to go with you on your Exploring Michigan Walk. Talk with the other kids and decide where you're going to explore. Get permission from an adult in your family to take your walk. Tell that person where you're going, who's going with you, and when you plan to leave and return.
2. Gather any materials you need for your walk, such as sunscreen, insect repellent, a notebook, a pencil or pen, and a copy of "Plan It: Your Personal Guide to Making a Plan and Carrying It Out" for each person.
3. As you set off into the area in which you're going to take your Exploring Michigan Walk, move at a slow, exploring pace, rather than an "I have to be there in 5 minutes" pace. Use all of your senses to see all that's there, looking at the land, smelling its changing scents, feeling the wind in your hair and the sun on your face, while listening for new and different sounds. Remember to look high . . . and low. Examine the big features . . . and the tiniest.
4. Think about the following ideas and questions while you explore. You may want to take notes on what you're seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling.
 - What is happening in this place? Is anything happening that only takes place at this time of year or this time of day (for example, wildflowers blooming, spring peepers calling, leaves falling, wildlife moving)?
 - Do you see any signs of wildlife, such as tracks, nests, droppings?
 - What do you see?
 - What could it be?
 - What was it like before now?
 - What might or could it be like in the future?
5. Don't worry if you can't identify everything you're seeing, hearing, smelling or feeling as you explore. Don't worry if you can't answer every question about the natural features of the site that pops into your own or the other explorers' minds. Just write down the questions and consider them opportunities for more research.
6. After you've all moved around for awhile in the area you're exploring, find a place where each of you can sit or stand apart from but still within eyesight of each other. Just be quiet for about 5 minutes. Focus on what you're seeing hearing, smelling and feeling.





TALKING IT OVER:

After about 5 minutes, gather in a circle and compare notes on your explorations. Think about, talk about, and perhaps write down, your answers to the following questions:

- What was the most interesting object or feature that you saw, heard, smelled or felt?
- Is there evidence of human activity at this site? Do you think the human activity is harmful or helpful to the area? How can you tell?
- Is the site you explored one you'd like to get to know better? How could you do that?
- What is one natural feature that you saw that you would like to learn more about? How could you do that?
- What was one natural feature that you saw that might be unique to Michigan? (If you didn't take your walk in Michigan, what's one natural feature that might be unique to your area?)

TRY THIS, TOO:

- Take an Exploring Michigan Walk through the same area at about the same time every day for a week or a month. Or take walks early in the school year, throughout the year, or visit one space at several seasons. Record any patterns you observe.
- As you walk, focus on one feature or aspect of the area. For example, watch for activity patterns in the wildlife (such as birds or insects) you may see. Or watch the rain and watch where water accumulates after a rain, tracing water from rooftops and parking lots to where it goes.
- Take photographs of any especially interesting objects or features you discover. Be sure to take notes about what you're photographing. Explain when and what you took a picture of, why you noticed it, then describe what you photographed and what you think it could be. If you don't have a camera, you could try your hand at sketching interesting objects and features.
- Find out some of the history of or stories about the area. You might look for an old map or photos showing the site, or talk to long-time residents of the area.
- Share what you've observed and learned with a family member or another adult, or prepare a presentation or display for your school science fair or county fair.
- Prepare a display of how the area in which you took your Exploring Michigan Walk changes throughout the day, or over several seasons.
- If the site of your exploration could use a little positive human intervention and you'd like to organize it, use the "Plan It: Your Personal Guide to Making a Plan and Carrying It Out" sheet to guide your efforts.
- Expand your learning about your natural environment with the help of *The Walk: Taking Your Youth Outdoors*, by Michigan 4-H Youth Development. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Extension. 2000. "The Walk" is available through your county MSU Extension office.

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PLAN IT!

Your Personal Guide to Making a Plan and Carrying It Out

Project: _____

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

I want to learn more about this topic: _____

This is what I want to do: _____

I want to do it by this date: _____

This is what I need to do it: _____

This is how I can do it: _____

These are problems I might run into: _____

This is how I can share what I learn: _____

Looking Back . . .

This is what I did: _____

This is how I felt about it: _____

This is what I would do differently next time: _____
