

OBSERVE NATURE *like* JOHN MUIR

A Sharing Nature Activity by Joseph Cornell

“I’d sit for hours watching the birds or squirrels, or looking into the faces of flowers. When I discovered a new plant, I sat beside it for a minute or a day, to make its acquaintance and try to hear what it had to tell me.”

—John Muir: *My Life with Nature*

Most people look but don’t see. This activity helps you discover and remember the physical characteristics and special quality of an animal.

Choose an animal that is easy to observe, such as a bird, frog, or insect. To see your animal well, use binoculars or a magnifying glass if you have them. If you can’t find an animal to observe, choose a tree, flower, or even a rock or river.

As you study your special animal (or plant, etc.), look for characteristics you’ve never noticed before—the color of its eyes, how it moves, or the texture or pattern of its leaves or feathers.

A) LIST SEVEN THINGS YOU’VE DISCOVERED ABOUT YOUR ANIMAL OR PLANT.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

B) CHOOSE A WORD THAT DESCRIBES HOW YOUR ANIMAL MOVES (OR STANDS, IF IT IS A PLANT):

C) WRITE A WORD OR PHRASE THAT EXPRESSES THE UNIQUE SPIRIT OF YOUR ANIMAL OR PLANT:

D) IF YOU WERE TO GIVE YOUR ANIMAL OR PLANT A NAME, WHAT WOULD IT BE, AND WHY?

E) WRITE A SIMPLE POEM OR STORY ABOUT YOUR ANIMAL OR PLANT. TELL WHAT YOU ADMIRE ABOUT IT. BEFORE YOU START, READ JOHN MUIR'S ACCOUNT OF WESTERN JUNIPERS. MUIR SAW EVERYTHING AS ALIVE WITH ITS OWN UNIQUE BEAUTY.

Western Juniper by John Muir

The Sierra juniper is one of the hardiest of all mountaineers. Growing mostly on ridges and rocks, these brave highlanders live for over twenty centuries on sunshine and snow. Thick and sturdy, junipers easily survive mountain storms. A truly wonderful fellow, he seems to last about as long as the granite he stands on. Surely he is the most enduring of all tree mountaineers—never seeming to die a natural death. If protected from accidents, he would perhaps be immortal. I wish I could live like these junipers, on sunshine and snow, and stand beside them for a thousand years. How much I should see, and how delightful it would be!