



# Flow Learning™

## Natural Steps to Nature Awareness

**A**s a young naturalist I realized there is a sequence for games and activities that, regardless of a group's age, mood, and culture, always seems to work best. People everywhere respond to this sequence because it is in harmony with deeper aspects of human nature.



This sequence provides a simple framework that allows you to structure nature awareness classes for best effect. You can meet people where they are in interest and energy level, and then guide them step-by-step

toward more meaningful and profound nature experiences.

Flow Learning's four stages flow naturally from one to the next. Each stage contains nature activities that are easy to play, joyful, intellectually stimulating, and highly engaging.

Flow Learning can be used successfully in sessions lasting from thirty minutes to all day. Although it was originally developed for teaching outdoor nature classes, it can be used to teach any subject matter, indoors or outdoors.

### THE FLOW LEARNING SEQUENCE:

Stage One: **AWAKEN ENTHUSIASM**

Stage Two: **FOCUS ATTENTION**

Stage Three: **OFFER DIRECT EXPERIENCE**

Stage Four: **SHARE INSPIRATION**

*Let's look at the stages one by one:*

## Stage One: AWAKEN ENTHUSIASM

Without enthusiasm, people learn very little, and can never have a meaningful experience of nature. By enthusiasm, I don't mean jumping-up-and-down excitement, but an intense flow of personal interest and alertness.

*Awaken Enthusiasm games make learning fun, instructive, and experiential—and establish a rapport between teacher, student, and subject.*



## Stage Two: FOCUS ATTENTION

Learning depends on focused attention. Enthusiasm alone isn't enough. If our thoughts are scattered, we can't be intensely aware of nature, nor of anything else. As leaders, we want to bring students' enthusiasm toward a calm focus.



*Focus Attention activities help students become attentive and receptive to nature.*

## Stage Three: OFFER DIRECT EXPERIENCE

During immersive nature experiences, students make a deep connection with an aspect of nature. *Offer Direct Experience* activities are built on the students' enthusiasm and receptivity, and are generally quiet and profoundly meaningful.



*By bringing us face to face with a bird, a wooded hill, or any natural subject, Offer Direct Experience activities give us intuitive experiences of nature.*

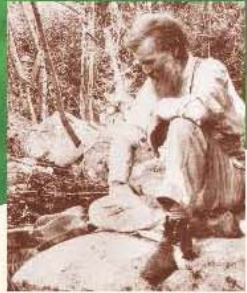
Intuitive experiences are non-rational and provide us with inner, direct knowledge of nature. Henry David Thoreau called intuitive learning “Beautiful Knowledge.”

## Stage Four: SHARE INSPIRATION

Reflecting and sharing with others strengthen and clarify one's experience. Sharing brings to the surface unspoken but often universal feelings that—once communicated—allow people to feel a closer bond with the topic and with one another.

*Share Inspiration activities create a sense of completion and an uplifting atmosphere conducive to embracing noble ideals.*





## OBSERVE NATURE LIKE JOHN MUIR

“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. \_\_\_\_\_

\* John Muir paraphrased by Joseph Cornell, *John Muir: My Life with Nature* (Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications, 2000), 28.



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!

\* John Muir paraphrased by Joseph Cornell, *John Muir: My Life with Nature* (Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications, 2000), 65.