

INTRODUCTION
For PARENTS

Teaching the Joy of the Earth

There is something soothing and calming and deeply satisfying in the earth itself. Just to watch a sunset or let rich, brown soil run through our fingers connects a us to a tangible source of joy.

In our industrialized age, many of us feel that we have less and less to do with the earth . . . less contact with it, less reliance on it, less opportunity to experience its joys. Actually, in many ways, just the contrary can be true. We are more mobile, we have more leisure time, we have daily access to the fruit and bounty of parts of the earth that past generations had rarely even seen. We know so much more about the earth . . . about its complexity, its delicate ecological balance, its endless species and varieties of life. And of course our technology allows us to see and experience parts of the earth remotely and virtually that we will never visit in the flesh.

Concept

All we need is the *desire* to experience the earth's joy, and nature will take care of the rest. Here is an example from an adult perspective from the book *Teaching Children Joy*:

Flat, green, tilted mountainside darker greens, rocky mountaintop grays; I drink these in as the plane descends to land in Jackson Hole. Half an hour later I'm fishing in a clear brook. To my back stretches the soft, morning-lighted forest. Long, late-July grass carpets to the ground below the large spruce; a smaller fir grows to my left. The downstream surface of the brook faintly flickers, reflecting light green trees at the back, dark green mountains in the middle, and blue sky in front of me.

Across the stream from me lies the Snake River Valley, and behind it, the Teton range. White, midsummer glaciers mark the crags and shaded spots in the jutting rock. A hawk floats, wing-tip feathers spread, across my field of vision. To my right, upstream, rise the Grand Tetons themselves, drawing the eye with an excitement that speeds the heart. They push through the only clouds in the sky. (A lonely cloud often sits there as if caught and held by the peaks.)

When I shut my eyes to make more of my brain available to my ears, I hear two ripples in the stream: one just upstream in my right ear and the other downstream in my left — stereophonic sound!

And the birds. I count five different kinds of chirps — only one that I know, the meadow lark: "Ain't I a pretty little bird?"

Once in a while a plane can be heard droning in the distance, and occasionally a cricket's rasp, behind and tucked between the other sounds.

One can't describe the smell. It combines so much — the grass, the trees, the sage — floating on air as clear and cool as the water in the stream. They seem so similar, the air and water: both clear, both cool, both fresh, both flowing (the current and the breeze)

I guess one reason I love Jackson so much is the seasons — the change, the transition, and the fact that, since I come only five or six times a year, the changes are distinct rather than gradual. One time (early summer) it will be like the day at the brook. Next time (early autumn) brings Indian summer when cottonwoods start to turn color, Snake River starts to turn clear, air starts to turn crisp, and sagebrush mountainsides look like scuffed buckskin against the sky's deeper blue.

Next time it's late fall: the mantle of golden quaking aspen filters and softens the sun's more slanted rays. Flamelike cottonwoods pull forth the valley's deep purples and the cloud's fleecy white. The air is even crisper, almost tart. Then I come again in midwinter to ski; to sit alone in a soft snowstorm on a split-rail fence; to hear the silence of the white world; to see the fleecy, buffeting flakes building into quiet, white mounds around the darker, colder, half-ice streams; to feel the whole vibrant world settle and sleep.

There is such beauty in the earth. Joy comes through sensing it — with all five senses. I remember a poet I knew once, one who wrote mostly of the earth, who saw so much in the earth that I didn't see. He had a sign on his wall that said: "Five Sense Sagacity." I asked him about it. He said that serendipity, which means happy accidents, pleasant surprises, comes about through sagacity, which means acute awareness, appreciation, sensitivity, which in turn comes about through applied, through use of all five senses. Think about that for a moment; it is quite a message: "Happiness comes through awareness."

Joy and opportunity lie in the appreciation of the earth's beauties. So often we miss these joys — not because the earth lacks beauty (for indeed, every part of it is beautiful), but because of our apathy, our failure to see and to notice, our tendency to take it for granted.

Tips and Reminders

1. Visit your local library with the book list and check out the books for your assigned lessons. If any in your group have nature photo books or other things that celebrate the beauty and variety of the physical world, you might ask to have those loaned to the *Joy School Box* for the entirety of the unit, since they could be used throughout the unit for Gathering Activities and lessons.
2. Read the corresponding chapter, "Joy of the Earth" in *Teaching Your Children Joy* by Richard and Linda Eyre, so you will better understand the joy you are trying to teach. (Free copies can be found and downloaded immediately at eyresfreebooks.com)
3. Be sure you have read the Joy School Start Up Manual.

4. Since this is your second unit, most if not all of the parents in your group have now had a chance to host and teach Joy School, so it might be wise to discuss experiences from the past month with the other parents. Briefly discuss problems and successes and work out any “kinks” that will make things run more smoothly this month.
5. Before starting each new unit of Joy School, it is important to have clearly in mind just exactly what you are teaching . . . just exactly what kind of feelings you hope to open to the children. In this “conceptual overview” each month we try to sample and describe these feelings.
6. An ant farm or an incubator with eggs to hatch would be wonderful to have in your class if they are available to you.
7. Obviously, being outdoors is the best way to experience the Joy of the Earth. When the weather permits, we encourage you to take the children outside for stories, discussions, etc. so that they can feel the joy of the earth even as they are learning about it.
8. During this unit, try to take time to “stop, look, and listen” with the children. Frequently use phrases such as, “I see _____ . What do you see?” or ask questions, “I wonder what made this hole in the ground? Do you think something lives in here?” Help the children to appreciate the earth and to “feel the joy.”
9. During Mellow Time, in addition to the other suggested activities, you could use “The Flight of the Bumblebee,” “The Dance of the Flowers,” (easily available on You Tube) or any music that sparks their imaginations. Ask the children to close their eyes and imagine what the music is telling them and/or what part of nature it reminds them of.

Lesson Overviews

Lesson 2.1: Experiencing the Earth

This week’s lessons emphasize the joyful **experiencing** of the earth through the five senses. This week’s teacher will be helping the children to make “nature viewers” so that the children can experience nature on the “micro” level — one eye-ful at a time.

Lesson 2.2: Field Trip, Nature Walk

On a short **nature walk**, the children will get to experience for themselves the joy of the earth. This is a great opportunity for the parent-teacher of this module to challenge the

children to apply what they're learning about their senses and look for specific "joys" in nature around them.

Lesson 2.3: Seasons of the Earth

This and the next three lessons emphasize the joy-giving miracles of nature from seasons, seeds and animals, and our ability to understand and enjoy them.

Lesson 2.4: Super Seeds

Children will be introduced to the growth cycle by learning about **seeds and trees**. They will also enjoy making **applesauce** from scratch.

Lesson 2.5: Amazing Animals

The children are encouraged to bring pets for "**show and tell**."

Lesson 2.6: Care of the Earth

This lesson deals principally with the obligation and the joy of using common sense in caring for the earth and all its creatures.

By the End of This Unit...

By the end of this unit, you should see a marked difference in the children's ability to listen and learn during Joy School. They should be fairly comfortable with the "routine", but should also continue to be delighted by the new activities, songs, and discussions every week. Continue to discuss rules of the Joy School so that their attention to them does not wane.

The Joy of the Earth Unit is usually very fun for the children, and more than anything, you should see an increase in curiosity and delight in the earth around them. Take the time at home to share this curiosity and delight so that it opens up a lifelong tradition of sharing in the Joys of the Earth as a family.

Book List

(*Bold numbers are the lessons in which these particular books are used*) Any of the other books would be good options for the Nature Walk excursion: only take along one or two books. Other books can be provided for the children to look at during Free Play or Gathering Time.

2.3	<i>Hello Spring</i>	Mary Packard	Children enjoy and notice a spring day.
2.3	<i>Caps, Hats, Socks and Mittens</i>	Louise Bourden	A book about the four seasons.
2.4	<i>A House is a House for Me</i>	Mary Ann Hoberman	A book about different places where animals and people live. Older book and illustrations, but well received by children.
2.6	<i>The Great Trash Bash</i>	Loreen Leady	This animal town must figure out a way to take care of all the trash that has piled up.
	<i>Gifts</i>	Phyllis Limacher Tildes	A young girl enjoys the simple gifts of nature.
	<i>The Earth is Good</i>	Michael De Munn	Watercolor illustrations accompany this celebration of nature presented in a chant.
	<i>The Happy Day</i>	Ruth Krauss	What do the animals find when they away after the winter snow?
	<i>Creatures at My Feet</i>	Sherry Neidigh Rain	Rhyming description of what the children can find at their feet.
	<i>Gilberto and the Wind</i>	Marie Hall Ets	Lovely, simple book about children interacting with the world around them.
	<i>What I See</i>	Holly Keller	A short rhyming book about what a boy sees on his walk. (Throughout the story ask, "Is it nature or man- made?")
	<i>Inch by Inch</i>	Leo Lionni	An inchworm measures everything under the sun. Beautiful illustrations.
	<i>Curious George Plants a Tree</i>	Margaret and H.A. Rey	The title says it all.
	<i>The Earth Book</i>	Todd Parr	Bold, colorful book about ways to help take care of the earth.
	<i>In My World</i>	Lois Ehlert	Vibrant die-cut celebration of nature's many wonders.

	<i>Leaf Man</i>	Lois Ehlert	Playful, beautiful book about the ways nature can spark our imagination.
	<i>Owl Moon</i>	Jane Yolen	A dad and his daughter go looking for owls at night.
	<i>The Story of Ferdinand</i>	Munro Leaf	The classic book about a peaceful bull.
	<i>The Little Island</i>	Margaret Wise Brown and Leonard Weisgard	The story about an island and the ways it is changed by the seasons, weather, and animals.
	<i>The Water Hole</i>	Graeme Base	Beautifully illustrated counting book with a message about conservation.
	<i>The Very Busy Spider</i>	Eric Carle	A story about a hardworking spider's day.
	<i>The Tiny Seed</i>	Eric Carle	A story about a little seed is blow about and eventually grows into a flower.