



Teachers Packet

Nature Explorers

AT

SAN FRANCISCO BOTANICAL GARDEN

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HELP YOUR STUDENTS BE NATURE EXPLORERS AT SAN FRANCISCO BOTANICAL GARDEN

San Francisco Botanical Garden (SFBG) is an extraordinary 55-acre public garden featuring over 8,500 kinds of plants from around the world. There is a lot to explore in this remarkable garden, but if you are a teacher planning to bring a class for a visit, it can be hard to know where to start!

The materials provided here are meant to help you to put together a "Nature Explorers" field notebook which will guide your students' explorations in the Garden. You can tailor the notebook to your class and its interests, needs, and abilities. Students can then work on the activities individually, or in cooperative learning groups.

The activity sheets have been designed to help you make the most of your visit to the Garden. Each sheet has two parts, one for you, the teacher, and the other for your students. On one side, a simple observation activity asks students to pay close attention to some part of the natural world and to record their observations. The other side contains information for the teacher, including suggestions for where to conduct the activity, a brief explanation of what students will learn, and a bit of background information.

Look through the activity sheets and decide which ones are most relevant to your class, considering grade level, curriculum area, and expected length of visit. Make copies which can then be bound together to make a booklet (many possibilities here – punch holes and bind with string, staple pages together, use recycled manila folders as covers, etc.) Each child or group of children can then have their own workbook. Activity sheets can be bound together in the same order for everyone, or mix them up so that different children or groups will be working on different activities at the same time.

Please remember that these activities are primarily designed to foster observation – there is seldom a right or wrong answer. Some children may begin to closely observe something other than what is described in the workbook. This is wonderful! The Garden is full of unpredictable surprises, opportunities for observation which can never be anticipated but only appreciated. Be sure to include a blank sheet in your students' notebook where they can record their observations of the unexpected.

Planning your Route

If you are unfamiliar with the Garden, we strongly recommend that you visit on your own prior to bringing your class. That way you will know better what to expect when you bring your students. Do remember that the Garden will be much less busy on a weekday than on a weekend, so crowds should not be a problem for a school group.

We will provide maps for your visit. You may wish to plan your visit in detail in advance, or you may wish to plan when you arrive. Older students can help decide where to go. If smaller groups are going out on their own with an adult, be sure to pick a clear meeting place and set a meeting time. Your class is welcome to eat lunch in the Garden. We do not have storage facilities for school lunches, so please plan accordingly. If your class would like to play active games, we ask that you go across the street to the Big Rec ballfield.

Garden Rules

Please be sure that your students and accompanying adults know basic garden rules, for their safety as well as the Garden's:

1. Walk ONLY on paths or on lawn areas. Do not step into plant beds as seedlings are trying to grow.
2. Do not pick anything from a living plant. You may carefully touch plants, and you may pick up plant parts that have fallen onto the path in order to examine them.
3. No collecting plant material. Return all plant materials to where you found them.
3. Please help protect our trees – don't tug on branches or climb any tree in the Garden.
4. Treat all animals you see, from insects and spiders to squirrels and birds, with respect. You are visiting their home.
5. Do not feed any animals in the Garden. They are wild animals and are healthiest when they find natural food. They may scratch or bite if they are frightened.
6. If your group wishes to play active games, please go across the street to the Big Rec Field. The Great Meadow is not a suitable area for ball play or other sports.

Nature Explorers

To help your students prepare for their walk, go through the “Becoming a Nature Explorer” activity on the following page. It will get them thinking about how they can be actively engaged during their visit to the Garden.

Becoming a nature explorer

A visit to SFBG is a chance for students to become nature explorers, investigating and discovering the wonders of the natural world around them. Help your students get ready to make the most of their trip with the following activity.

Introduce the concept of a "nature explorer" to your students – a nature explorer is someone who explores the natural world by observing closely, thinking about what they observe, coming up with ideas about what they discover, and sharing their discoveries. Every one of us can be a nature explorer – we all have special tools that can help us investigate the natural world.

Divide children into small groups. Ask them to think about what tools we have *in or on our bodies* that we can use to explore the world around us. Each group can make of a list of the tools they think of or can draw pictures illustrating their ideas. Have each group share their results with the class and compile their ideas in a large list or drawing.

Here are some suggestions – you and your class may think of others!

eyes - counters, cameras

noses – scent detectors

fingers – tweezers, feelers

hands- rulers, cups

hair – wind detector

memories – notebooks and pencils

ears – tape recorders

feet – transportation, rulers

skin – thermometer

TEACHER INFORMATION

Leaves in the Lawn

WHERE? This activity can be done in any of the lawn areas of the garden. The Great Meadow is ideal.

WHAT? Students closely observe the variety of plants found in the lawn, then record their observations.

WHY? This activity helps students focus, make careful observations, and recognize that the plant world is full of variety – even in a plain green lawn!

MORE You can often find a variety of small flowers growing in the lawn. Students can list the colors and count the petals.

If you are very lucky, you may spot a gopher in the lawn. Be sure to take the time to watch this little creature at work.

What grows in the lawn? Just grass? Look again!

Take a close look at the lawn and see how many different shapes of leaves you can find growing here.

Draw a picture of the leaves on this page.

I found _____ kinds of leaves!

TEACHER INFORMATION

Leaf Rubbings

WHERE? Students can pick up fallen leaves from the ground. Please remind students to return leaves to where they found them after they are done.

WHAT? Students make a leaf rubbing picture using a crayon and a leaf that they like. BRING CRAYONS! Help students find a flat, tough leaf on the ground - leaves that are too soft don't work so well. Students should carefully look at the leaves and notice the veins, which carry water and nutrients through the leaf. Students put their workbook on the ground or on a bench, then place the leaf under the activity sheet with the veiny side up. They should be able to feel the leaf through the paper. Finally, they should take a crayon and rub it sideways over that area of the paper. Watch the leaf picture appear! Try using different color crayons too.

WHY? Making a leaf rubbing will focus children's attention on the wide variety of shapes and textures of leaves. They will also notice the veins of a leaf, the system of "pipes" which carry water and nutrients through the plant.

MORE The leaves that make the best images are tough with prominent veins. Younger children may need help to find suitable leaves. Older children can be given the challenge of finding the leaves that work the best.

If you look on the ground under some of our magnolia or eucalyptus trees, you may find some "ghost leaves" or "leaf skeletons." These magical leaves have almost completely decomposed, leaving behind only their tough veins. Magnolia trees can be found in the Mesoamerican Cloud Forest, around and behind the Moon-Viewing Garden, as well as in a few other locations. Eucalyptus are here and there throughout the garden as well as in the Australian section.

Find a leaf you like lying on the ground. Now you can make a leaf picture with a crayon! Put the leaf under this piece of paper. Can you feel the leaf through the paper? If you can't, turn the leaf over. Now rub a crayon sideways over the paper and the leaf. Do another leaf if you want!

TEACHER INFORMATION

Leaf Smells

WHERE? The Garden of Fragrance is ideal. There are also concentrations of aromatic plants in the Mesoamerican Cloud Forest (look for the plant name "Salvia"), and aromatic plants in the sensory garden in the Children's Garden.

WHAT? Students rub the leaves of different plants, then smell their fingers to discover the scents of the different leaves. They describe their favorite scent and draw a picture of the plant.

WHY? While most people are aware of flowers having scents, we often don't notice that leaves can be scented as well. Students will be encouraged to use more of their senses when exploring plants.

MORE Flowers usually have scents designed to attract a pollinator, especially insects. Leaves often have scents designed to repel insects and other animals. Even the scents that we humans find appealing can be unpleasant for animals which want to eat a plant.

Herbs are plants whose strongly scented and flavored leaves are used in small amounts to flavor our food. Various teas are also made from leaves with strong scents and flavors.

We know that a flower can have a smell, but leaves can have a smell too! To smell a leaf, gently rub the leaf with your fingers, then smell your fingers.

Go to five different plants and smell the leaves.

What does your favorite plant smell like? _____

What does your favorite plant look like? You can draw it here.

TEACHER INFORMATION

Measuring Plants

WHERE? This activity can be done anywhere in the Garden. This is also a good introductory activity so students discover one way to make observations about the plants they will see.

WHAT? Students use their bodies to measure different plants and plant parts.

WHY? Students will discover the wide variety of sizes of plants and will relate them to their own bodies.

MORE For younger students, the main focus is primarily on relating plants to their own bodies. Older students can work on thinking about measurement in a more general way and can extend the activity in the classroom by making the conversion between their body part and inches or centimeters.

Plants come in all different sizes. Use your body to measure some of the plants in the Garden.

Find a flower you like. The flower is as big as your _____

Can you find a flower as big as your ear? What color is it?

Can you find a leaf as small as your fingernail? Draw it here.

Find the biggest leaf you can. It is as big as _____

Can you find a plant as tall as your knee? Draw a leaf from the plant here.

TEACHER INFORMATION

My Special Plant

WHERE? This activity can be done anywhere in the Garden.

WHAT? Students select one special plant to observe and describe.

WHY? This allows students to focus in on the characteristics of a single plant which they like.

MORE Be sure students realize that not every plant will have a fruit, or a flower, or a name tag. They should fill in as much of the work sheet as is relevant. If the name is a mystery, why not make up a name?

Find a plant you like. Describe your plant here so you will always remember it!

How big is your plant? _____

What colors do you see on your plant? _____

Draw one leaf of your plant here.

If your plant has any flowers, draw one here.

Does your plant have any fruit? Draw it here.

Write one thing that is special about your plant. _____

If you know your plant's name, write it here. _____

TEACHER INFORMATION

Flower Visitors

WHERE? This activity can be done anywhere in the Garden. The Mesoamerican Cloud Forest is blooming December through March, and the Mediterranean and Rhododendron Gardens are in bloom throughout the spring.

WHAT? Students observe a plant in flower to see if any pollinators visit the plant. If you wish, you can specify a period of time to observe – 3 to 5 minutes is usually enough.

WHY? Students learn to observe patiently, and they recognize that insects and other small animals interact with plants.

MORE This activity can be a starting point for a discussion of pollination, or it can serve as confirmation of what has been discussed in the classroom. If you are studying communities, you can talk about how the animals are doing a job for the plant (moving pollen) in exchange for a reward (nectar or pollen) without having to go into the details of pollination.

Find a plant that has at least ten flowers. Sit or stand quietly and watch the flowers for a little while.

Did any small animals visit the flowers? ___YES ___NO

Draw one of the flowers, and then draw any visitors you saw.

TEACHER INFORMATION

Animals in the Garden

WHERE? This activity can be done as you move through the Garden. Alternatively, stop at one or more of the ponds.

Please remind students to treat all animals they see, from insects and spiders to squirrels and birds, with respect. The Garden is their home.

WHAT? Students try to find an example of four basic types of animals in the gardens and draw what they see.

WHY? Students recognize that a variety of different kinds of animals make use of the garden.

MORE Squirrels are the most common mammal (except perhaps for humans!) that your students are likely to see. Various insects make the garden their home – be sure your students know to look for a six-legged creature. The best place to find a reptile or amphibian is at one of the ponds, where turtles and tadpoles find a home.

The animals that live in the Garden are all different shapes and sizes. See if you can find all of these – and draw a picture of what you see!

A BIRD

AN INSECT

A MAMMAL

A REPTILE OR AMPHIBIAN

TEACHER INFORMATION

Animals Homes and Animal Food in the Garden

WHERE? This activity can be done as students move through the Garden. Alternatively, stop at one of the ponds or in the Mesoamerican Cloud Forest to complete this activity.

WHAT? Students look for evidence of places where animals live as well as things that these animals might eat. Students record their observations, either by drawing or writing.

WHY? This sharpens students' observational skills and helps them recognize why there are animals in the garden.

MORE Students may need to be reminded that there are many different kinds of animals of all shapes and sizes – don't forget small animals like insects, slugs, and spiders!

Please do not feed any animals in the Garden. They are wild animals and are healthiest when they find natural food. They may scratch or bite if they are frightened.

Lots of animals live in the Garden. They live here because they can find places to live and food to eat. Can you find some places animals live, and some food animals eat? Write or draw them here.

SOME PLACES ANIMALS LIVE

SOME FOODS ANIMALS EAT

TEACHER INFORMATION

Animal Observation

WHERE? Animals of various types can be found throughout the Garden, but some areas are particularly rich. Turtles and ducks can be found at the Wildfowl Pond, while the other ponds may have herons, tadpoles, insects and other wildlife.

WHAT? Children observe an animal for several minutes and record what they see the animal do.

WHY? Students get a sense of how animals interact with their Garden environment.

MORE Don't forget that small animals such as insects, spiders, roly-polies and worms are fun to observe, not just the bigger and more dramatic mammals and birds.

The animals in the Garden use the plants in many different ways – shelter, food, nesting. After their observation, children can think about ways that the garden provides for the animals' needs.

Many animals live in the Garden because they can find food and shelter among the plants. Find one animal and watch it quietly for a few minutes.

My animal is a _____.

I saw my animal do these things: