

Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

October, 2022

Vol. 12, No. 4

Teach Your Children Well

by Joann Fricke

It's the question asked by every conservation group in Illinois, "How do we get young people interested in conservation?" Some high schools require Seniors to put in service hours to graduate, but that doesn't always lead to further interest. Most people in their 20s, 30s and 40s have full-time jobs, kids, hobbies and other interests. To be honest, I didn't have an interest in conservation until I was in my 50s and purchased bluff property with upland forest and hill prairies.

For several years, Clifftop has reached out to local elementary schools to allow us to come into their fourth grade classrooms to speak about conservation. The reason for focusing on fourth graders is because fifth graders attend Conservation Day at the Waterloo Sportsman's Club each year and we thought this would be a natural lead-in.

After happening upon a cartoon on PBS titled "Nature Cat" and having a conversation with the production company responsible for this wonderful and educational program, Clifftop was given permission to use two of their episodes to bring awareness to elementary students about invasive plant species and prairies. This year, one of the classes requested a guided hike to go along with the video. They were very enthusiastic and took lots of notes about the things they saw.



Students watching the "Nature Cat" episode about invasive species



Same students on their nature hike

As parents, educators and friends, this is the age group we need to engage. Take them on hikes. Teach them about the value of nature—animals and plants. Encourage their curiosity. If they ask questions you can't answer, tell them you'll look it up and get back to them, and DO it, don't just SAY it. Explain why they should stay on trails (to protect sensitive plants and animals) and why they shouldn't take anything from a natural area (because what you take may be someone's home or the plant may only grow in that one spot). Please contact us if you know of an elementary classroom that would like to participate.

Raising a Wild Child

Text and photos by Dr. Susan Barker

*Nature experiences lead to a love for all things wild.
And in the big scheme of things, that matters.*

A wild child loves butterflies, moss, and pebbles. They love to watch bumble bees buzz from flower to flower. For them, holding a wiggly tadpole in their wet hands is a delightful act of courage. Every family trek, be it on land or water, is full of opportunities to help young people discover all that's wonderful about nature.

Promoting stewardship might actually be easier than we think. In the late 1970s, people were asked what motivated them to work in natural resource management or with environmental organizations. The answer boiled down to one surprisingly simple thing. "I had a special place where I played as a kid." That place might have been a patch of woods, a creek, or a vacant lot in the city. The adventures they had while playing helped them fall in love with their place. From that grew the desire to protect other special places.



Once a parent or grandparent understands that naming every tree, wildflower, or bird isn't what counts, great things can happen. In the mind and soul of a child, experiencing nature is what matters most. By keeping a few tips in mind, you can create memories that will last a lifetime, all while growing the next generation of environmental caretakers.

Getting started

Seek and Find Together (Look) - Encourage kids to notice and share things with you. It shouldn't be just you telling or showing them things. Ask, "How many colors can you see?" (Don't forget blue sky!) Avoid saying names such as, "This is moss." Play the game, "I see something you don't see and its green and growing at the bottom of a tree." This is a fun way to introduce things. If the child is young, standing close to the object will help lead them to success.

Shhh, what was that? (Listen) - Challenge everyone to be as quiet as possible. Ask if anyone hears nature noises. If someone says, "buzzing insects or woodpecker," ask them to point to where they heard it.

Touch - Encourage them to touch moss. Ask, "How does it feel?" Nodding, and smiling a lot is a great reward for answers. Avoid the immediate inclination to name things. Give older kids a chance at the name. Next, kick the game up a notch for those older ones with a simple question: Does moss always grow on the north side of a tree, or on the shady side of a tree? This turns kids into thinkers; into scientists. You'll need to compare trees in an open area to those in a heavily shaded area. Finish with another question: "So, if we want to use moss as a compass, does the tree need to be in a shady or more sunny area?" If you want to introduce the idea of micro-environments/climates and the impact of sunlight and temperature on living things, this is a great way to do it.

Smell - Flowers, leaves, soil, and the air right before and after a rain all provide easy moments of joy.



Taste - Careful here! Leave mushrooms to the experts. Tasting wood sorrel, blackberries, strawberries, and other wild foods, that you can *POSITIVELY IDENTIFY*, makes for special memories. However, there are deadly look-alikes for wild grapes, mushrooms, and other plants. *A Peterson Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants* shows poisonous look-alikes and the edible plant on the same page.

Become a Sky Watcher

Everyone who spends time outdoors knows the importance of paying attention to the weather. Learn how clouds and campfire smoke can provide clues about it.

Wispy, feathery cirrus clouds usually point to a change in the weather. If the sky grows cloudier, there is a good chance of rain. Keep your eyes open for sun dogs. These little chunks of rainbow are created when the sun shines through cirrus clouds. They appear year-round.

Cotton ball cumulus clouds are signs of good weather for several days to come. Have fun with kids by encouraging them to look for shapes in the clouds.

Much like the “red sky at morning, sailors take warning” saying, campfire smoke tell weather tales, too. “When smoke rises high, expect fair skies. When smoke hangs low, bad winds might blow.”



After Dark

Watching the full moon rise over treetops or the bluff is really, really cool. Star gazing is awesome. If you don’t know constellations, help your child connect the dots to create their own images in the sky. Check out dates for meteor showers. If you see a falling star, remember to make a wish! Insiders tip: planets are so bright, they don’t twinkle!

At night, some mammals can be identified by the color of their eyeshine. If you shine a flashlight into the woods or prairie and see pink eyes shining back at you, it’s an opossum. Ask older kids to research eyeshine and make a list linking animals to the color of their eyeshine.

On that same note, try Spider Sniffing. No, it isn’t a snipe hunt! Spiders have reflective eyes too. Hold a bright flashlight at the end of your nose. Point it at the base of trees or into leaves. Slowly, move the beam around. When you see tiny specs of light, walk forward keeping the flashlight on them. When you are close enough, you will see the spider!

Success happens when we...

- ❖ Share just enough to create a spark of interest.
- ❖ Let kids “teach” us.
- ❖ Take photos to record memories.
- ❖ Laugh and have fun!



Dr. Susan L. Barker grew up in Dupon and fell in love with the bluffs, marsh, and rock bottom creeks. She went on to focus on earth and environmental science and placed one foot in science classrooms and the other in natural resource management. Susan (Sus for short) now writes to encourage others to love nature for all it is worth!

Photos from Membership Day



10/29/2022



Thanks
to all who
attended!

