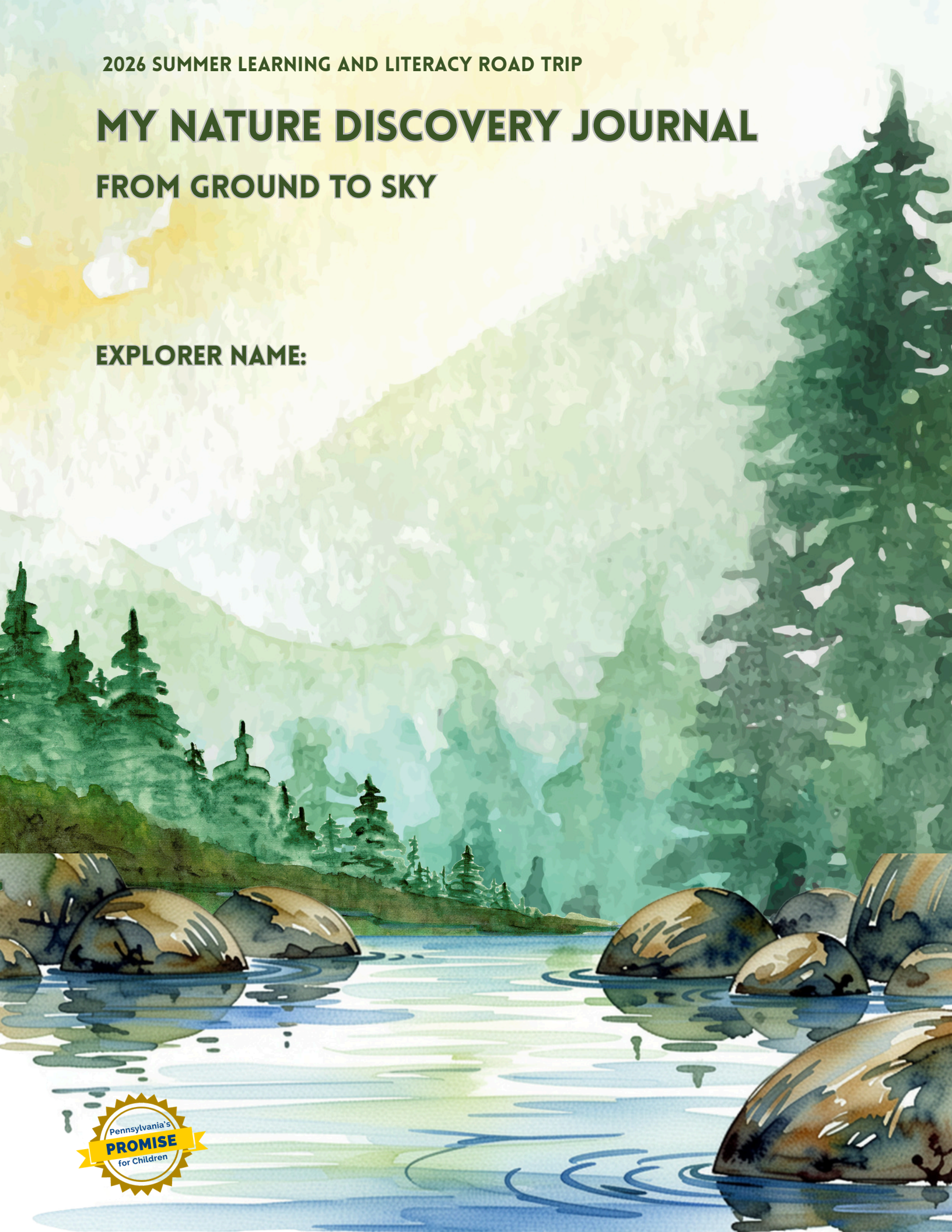


2026 SUMMER LEARNING AND LITERACY ROAD TRIP

MY NATURE DISCOVERY JOURNAL

FROM GROUND TO SKY

EXPLORER NAME:



WELCOME TO THE 2026 SUMMER LEARNING AND LITERACY ROAD TRIP!

Welcome, families! PA's Promise for Children is excited to welcome you to the 2026 Summer Learning and Literacy Road Trip. This will be a fun, engaging journey for young children and their caregivers to learn, explore, and grow together all summer long.

This year's theme, From Ground to Sky, encourages children to explore the natural world all around them, from the rocks beneath their feet to the native trees reaching high into the sky across Pennsylvania. Along the way, children will be invited to look closely, ask questions, and discover how nature connects to their everyday lives.

This Nature Journal is your family's travel companion! Inside, you'll find:

- Inclusive early learning activities designed for all young children
- Hands-on nature experiences to do in your backyard, a park, or on a walk
- Family-friendly activities that support learning through play and exploration

There are pages designed especially for your young learner, as well as Family Focus pages for you as a parent, teacher, family member, friend, or caregiver!

All activities within the Nature Journal are thoughtfully aligned with the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards. The Early Learning Standards help children build important skills in language, literacy, curiosity, observation, and self-regulation that will be needed as they begin school and throughout their lives.

The Summer Learning and Literacy Road Trip is about learning side by side, slowing down, and enjoying simple moments in nature. Whether you're reading, observing, drawing, or wondering together, every activity helps build a strong foundation for lifelong learning. As a reminder, children develop skills in many different ways. With support and flexibility, every child can explore nature and learn successfully.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's development, please talk with your child's healthcare professional. You can also call Pennsylvania's CONNECT Helpline at 1-800-692-7288 for information about your child's development and to connect with Early Intervention Services and Supports in Pennsylvania.

We're so glad you're joining us. Let the adventure begin, from ground to sky!

MY NATURE PROMISE

I will take care of nature by:



Staying on paths



Being quiet and observant



Following the Leave No Trace Principles

- Know before you go
- Choose the right path
- Trash your trash
- Leave what you find
- Be careful with fire
- Respect the wildlife
- Be kind to other visitors

Below, draw, scribble, trace, color, dictate, use stickers, or sign how you will take care of nature.

FAMILY FOCUS: LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES

Age: Infant to Kindergarten

Leave No Trace Focus: Leave what you find & respect nature

- 1. Explore at your child's pace.** Take a slow walk, sit outside together, or look out a window, whatever feels best for your child. Moving, resting, or observing are all great ways to participate.
- 2. Notice nature in many ways.** Help your child notice items in nature they can see, hear, smell, or feel, such as leaves, rocks, flowers, birds, or insects.
 - You can point, name the item, show a picture, or use gestures or communication devices.
- 3. Use simple, supportive language.** Say short phrases and repeat them as needed. Pair words with gestures, pictures, or signs if helpful:
 - "We can look at the flower. It stays here."
 - "The rock lives on the ground."
 - "Birds need their home."
- 4. Offer sensory experiences with choice.** Invite your child to gently touch grass, tree bark, or a leaf if they want to.
 - If touching is uncomfortable, they can look closely, listen, or use a tool (like a stick or glove).
 - Remind them: "We touch gently and leave it where it is."
- 5. Celebrate efforts and kindness.** Praise your child in a way that feels meaningful to them:
 - "Great job being kind to nature!"
 - Use smiles, signing, or a favorite signal to celebrate success.



Young children learn kindness best by watching the caring actions of the adults and children around them. When families and caregivers model gentle words, helping behaviors, and respect, children begin to copy those actions in their own play and relationships. Learning kindness by example helps children understand how to treat others with care and empathy every day.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Find a comfortable place to be, in a spot that works for your body. Take a moment to look, listen, feel, or notice in your own way for a short time.

You can share what you notice by talking, pointing, gesturing, choosing pictures, or using a device.

What catches your eye?

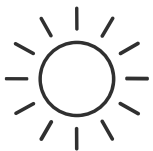
What colors do you notice?

How does the weather feel today?

All ways of noticing and sharing are welcome.

Select one or more:

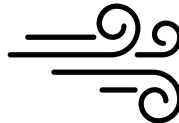
Sunny



Cloudy



Windy



Rainy



Other

What do you hear?

Select one or more:



Do you hear anything else?

Draw, scribble, trace, color, dictate, use stickers, or sign what you hear:

FAMILY FOCUS: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Age: Toddler to Kindergartner

Skill Focus: Listening, attention, self-regulation

- 1. Choose a comfortable sit spot.** Find a place where your child feels safe and comfortable. This might be a bench, wheelchair, blanket, porch, classroom window, or shaded area. Sitting, standing, or lying down are all okay.
- 2. Observe quietly in a way that works for your child.** Spend about 1-2 minutes together looking, listening, or noticing.
 - Quiet bodies are encouraged, but movement, fidgeting, or gentle sounds are okay.
 - Some children may prefer shorter observation times.
- 3. Explore with guiding questions.** Invite your child to respond using words, signs, gestures, pictures, eye-gaze, or communication devices:
 - "What catches my eye?"
 - "What colors do I see?"
 - "What is the weather like today?"You can also model answers if helpful:
 - "I see green leaves."
 - "The air feels warm."
- 4. Use multiple senses and supports.** If seeing is difficult, encourage listening, feeling the breeze, or noticing smells. Use visual cards, objects, or photos to support understanding and participation.
- 5. Celebrate participation.** Acknowledge your child's effort in a meaningful way:
 - "You did a great job noticing!"
 - Use smiles, claps, thumbs-up, or another preferred celebration.



Children's self-regulation is a child's growing ability to manage their feelings, bodies, and behavior, such as calming down when upset, waiting for a short turn, or listening for a moment, with help from caring adults.

Self-regulation helps children slow their bodies, handle big emotions, and make safe, kind choices as they learn and grow.

LOOK CLOSER

Choose one small object (like a leaf, stem, bark, cloud, or insect).

Explore its shape, texture, and pattern in different ways.

Use the space below to share by drawing, scribbling, tracing, coloring, dictating, or using stickers about the object you chose.

FAMILY FOCUS: LOOK CLOSER

Age: Toddler to Kindergarten

Focus: Observation, attention, early language

- 1. Choose one small object together.** Pick one item to explore, such as a leaf, stem, bark, cloud, or insect.
 - Your child may choose by pointing, looking, touching, using pictures, or with adult support.
 - A photo or classroom object can be used if going outside is not possible.
- 2. Explore the object in different ways.** Help your child notice the object's shape, texture, pattern, color, or movement.
 - They can look, gently touch, listen, or observe from a distance.
 - If touching is uncomfortable, they can use a tool (like a stick) or simply observe.
- 3. Talk, show, or share observations.** Encourage your child to share what they notice in a way that works best for them:
 - Words, signs, gestures, facial expressions
 - Pictures, symbols, or communication devices
 - You may model simple descriptions such as: "The leaf is bumpy." or "I see lines on the bark."
- 4. Express ideas creatively.** Invite your child to draw, scribble, trace, color, dictate, or use stickers to show their ideas.
 - Writing can include marks, letters, drawings, or adult-written words based on your child's input.
 - Digital drawing tools or textured art materials can also be used.
- 5. Celebrate effort and discovery.** Praise participation in a meaningful way:
 - "You noticed so many details!"
 - Use smiles, claps, signs, or another preferred form of encouragement.



Teaching observation to young children is important because it helps them slow down, notice their surroundings, and learn how the world works. When children learn to observe, they build focus, language, curiosity, and a caring connection to the world around them.

LOOK UP

Look for clouds in the sky (or through a window).

Choose one to watch, from sitting, standing, or moving.

What does it remind you of?

What do you notice or wonder?

Show your cloud by drawing, tracing, pointing, describing, or using stickers in the space below.

FAMILY FOCUS: LOOK UP

Age: Infants to Kindergarteners

Focus: Curiosity, observation, language

1. **Explore together in a way that works for your family.** Take a short walk, roll, stroller ride, or sit outside in a yard, park, on a sidewalk, on a porch, or by a window.
2. **Pause when your child shows interest.** This might be by looking, pointing, touching, moving toward something, or using words or gestures (like a leaf, a bug, a stick, or a cloud).
3. **Wonder out loud.** Say, "I wonder..." and model curiosity:
 - · "I wonder where that bug is going."
 - · "I wonder why that leaf is so big."
4. **Invite your child to share.** Let your child share ideas using words, signs, sounds, pictures, movement, or a communication device. There are no wrong answers.
5. **Encourage and celebrate.** Smile and say, "That's a great wonder!" or show encouragement in a way your child enjoys.



Curiosity helps young children learn and grow. When children explore, notice new things, and ask questions, they build thinking, language, and problem-solving skills.

When adults encourage curiosity, children feel confident and excited about learning and learn that wondering, exploring, and trying are good things.

LOOK ON THE GROUND

Watch an insect move on paper, the ground, or in a picture or video.

If it's safe and comfortable, let it crawl nearby, or just watch.

Use the space below to show its path by drawing or tracing with a finger.

You can also point at or use arrows.

How does it move? Where might it be going?

Tell, sign, draw, or share a short story about it.

FAMILY FOCUS: LOOK ON THE GROUND

Age: Infants to Kindergartners

Skill Focus: Fine motor strength, hand-eye coordination

1. **Explore a comfortable outdoor space together.** Go to a yard, park, garden, porch, or look around from a stroller, wheelchair, or window.
2. **Invite your child to choose natural items.** Let your child pick small, safe items like pebbles, pinecones, acorns, or leaves by touching, pointing, looking, or choosing from a small selection.
3. **Place items into a container.** Encourage placing items into a bucket, cup, or container one at a time. A larger container or adapted tool can be used if needed.
4. **Support hand use in different ways.** Your child might pinch with fingers, grasp with their whole hand, use both hands, or use a scoop or helper tool.
 - Talk about what you notice. Describe the items together: "That leaf is small!" or "This rock feels smooth!"



Developing fine motor skills helps young children use their hands and fingers with control and confidence for everyday tasks like eating, drawing, turning pages, and getting dressed.

These skills support independence, focus, and early learning, and help children feel proud as they discover, "I can do it myself!"

FIND A TREE

Create a tree in the space below.

You can draw, scribble, trace, point, use stickers, or tell someone about your tree, and they can help add your ideas.

Any way you share your tree is just right.

Is your tree *coniferous*? Is your tree *deciduous*?

Coniferous: Coniferous trees are woody plants, mostly evergreens, that bear seeds within cones. They typically have needle-like or scale-like leaves.

Deciduous: Deciduous trees are plants that seasonally shed all their leaves, typically in the autumn. They remain dormant during winter or dry seasons.

FAMILY FOCUS: FIND A TREE

Age: Toddlers–Kindergarteners

Skill Focus: Language development, inclusion, communication, connection with nature

1. **Go to any nearby tree, at a park, along a sidewalk, or outside a building.**
2. **Help your child experience the tree in a way that works best for them:**
 - Look at the tree
 - Touch the bark or leaves (if comfortable)
 - Listen to leaves moving or birds nearby
3. **Talk about the tree using simple, descriptive words, and give plenty of time for responses.**
 - Children may:
 - Say words or sounds
 - Point, touch, or gesture
 - Use pictures, signs, or a communication device
 - Look toward the tree or smile
 - Adults can respond by naming and expanding:
 - “You touched the bark. The bark feels rough.”
 - “You pointed to the leaves. The leaves are green.”
4. **Provide simple language prompts.**
 - “What do you notice?”
 - “How does it feel?”
 - “Do you see the leaves or the branches?”
 - “This tree is tall!”
5. **Use repetition and pauses to support understanding.**

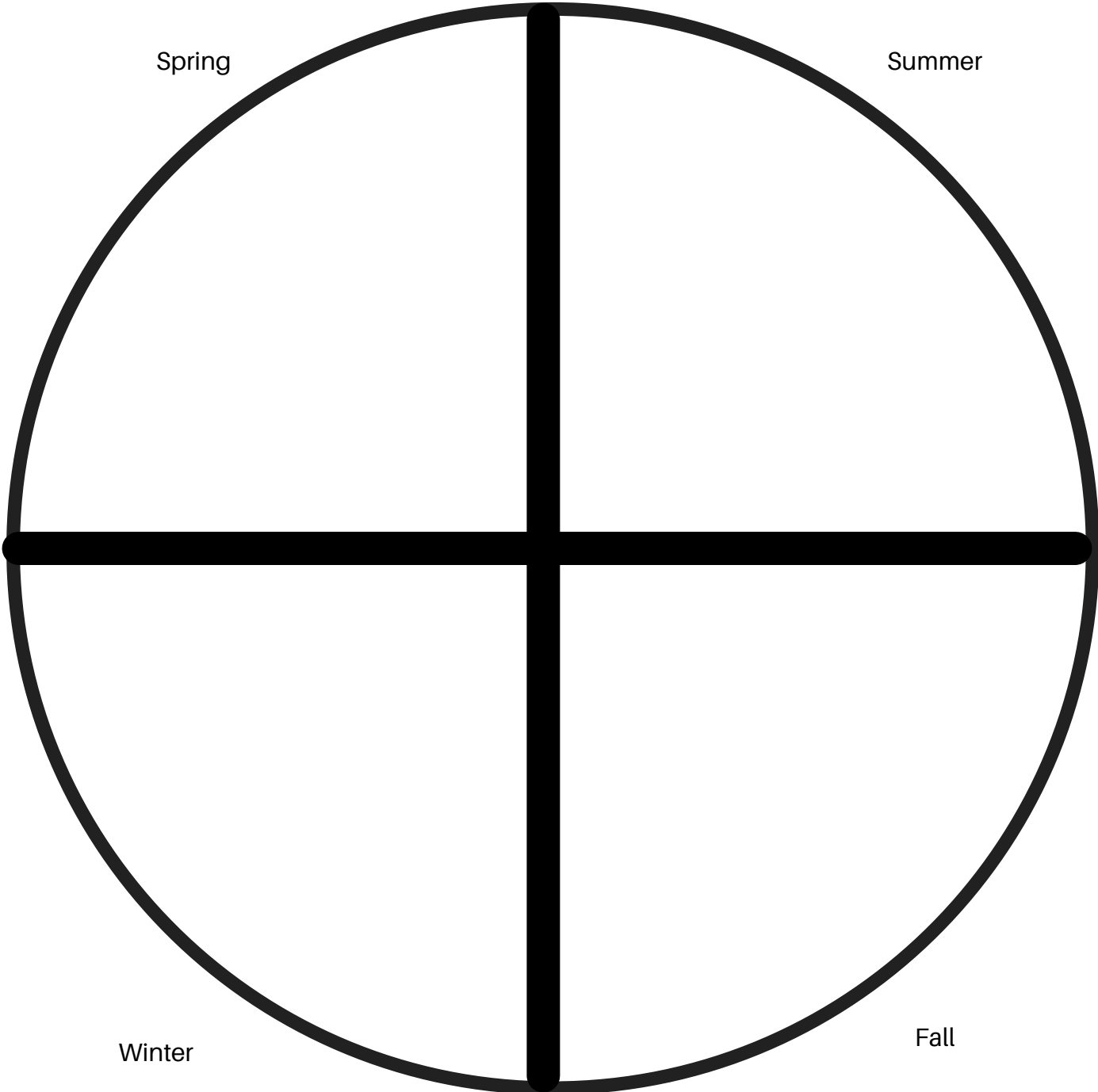


Language develops little by little, and every child learns to communicate in their own time and in their own way. Talking, listening, reading, singing, and even sharing quiet moments together all help build strong language skills. It all counts!

OBSERVE YOUR TREE

What does your tree look like in different seasons? Draw, color, paint, collage with natural materials, use stamps, point to pictures, or talk about the changes.

All ways of sharing ideas count!



OBSERVE YOUR TREE

Cut a viewfinder to look at the sky. Look, point, describe, gesture, or share pictures or a device to show what you notice in the sky. All ways of observing and communicating count!



FAMILY FOCUS: OBSERVE YOUR TREE

Age: Toddlers–Kindergartners

Skill Focus: Understanding same and different, observation, communication

1. **Choose safe, easy-to-hold nature items** (or pictures of items): leaves, rocks, sticks. Large or textured if helpful.
2. **Place items side by side** and invite your child to explore by looking, touching, pointing, sorting, or choosing.
3. **Talk simply:** “These are the same color,” or “These are different sizes.”
4. **Children can respond in many ways**, like words, gestures, eye gaze, pictures, or a communication device. All responses count.

Tips:

- Use one sense at a time (just look, just touch).
- Offer extra wait time and model language (“same,” “different,” “big,” “small”).
- Provide assistance as invited (hand-over-hand, positioning support).



Learning “same” and “different” helps children notice details, compare objects, and make sense of their world. These skills build a foundation for thinking, language, early math, and problem-solving in everyday learning.

PENNSYLVANIA ROCKS!

Find a rock in a way that works best for you, like by looking, touching, or choosing from a few options. Draw, trace, color, use stickers, select a picture, point, gesture, or tell an adult to help record your ideas. Name the rock and share what you like about it using words, sounds, pictures, or a communication device. All ways of sharing are welcome!

FAMILY FOCUS: PENNSYLVANIA ROCKS!

Age: Toddlers–Kindergartners

Skill Focus: Sorting, labeling, categorizing, communication

1. **Offer safe, accessible items or pictures of nature items** (leaves, rocks, sticks). Choose items that are large, textured, or easy to handle, or let children select with pointing or eye gaze.
2. **Invite children to sort in their own way.** They can sort by color, size, type, or texture. Use trays, mats, or clear spaces. Assistance and adaptive tools (like scoops or baskets) could be used.
3. **Label groups together** using simple words, pictures, signs, or a communication device. Model language: “These are big rocks.” “These are smooth.”
4. **Children can share ideas** by talking, gesturing, pointing, choosing, or watching. All participation counts!



Learning to sort, label, and categorize helps children make sense of their world by noticing what is alike and different. These skills support thinking, language, early math, and problem-solving, and help children feel confident organizing ideas and objects around them.

EXPLORE A LEAF

Explore your leaf in a way that works best for you.

You can draw it, trace it, color it, use stickers, point to a picture, or tell an adult about it. You can share about your leaf by talking, pointing, choosing pictures, or using a device. All ways of sharing are welcome!

(What do you notice about your leaf?)

I notice _____

(What questions do you have about your leaf?)

I wonder _____

(What does your leaf remind you of?)

It reminds me of _____

FAMILY FOCUS: EXPLORE A LEAF

Age: Toddlers–Kindergartners

Focus: Associations, matching, communication

1. **Offer real nature items or pictures of items** (leaves, rocks, sticks, trees, and their leaves). Choose items that are large, textured, or easy to see and touch, or let children observe from their position.
2. **Invite children to match things that go together in a way that works for them.** They can move items, point, look, choose between two options, or use eye gaze.
3. **Model simple language as you help:**
 - “These match.”
 - “This leaf goes with this tree.”
4. **Children can share their matches** through words, sounds, gestures, pictures, or a communication device. All ways of participating count!

Tips

- Focus on one match at a time
- Allow extra wait time
- Offer adult support or adaptive tools as welcomed



Learning matching and associations helps children make connections, notice how things go together, and understand their world. These skills support thinking, language, memory, and early problem-solving in a fun, natural way.

PATTERNS IN NATURE

Do you notice any patterns?

You can look, point, touch, talk, or use pictures or a device to show where you see them.

Use the space below to draw, trace, or use stickers.

You can also arrange objects or ask an adult to help record the patterns you notice.

All ways of sharing are welcome!

FAMILY FOCUS: PATTERNS IN NATURE

Age: Toddlers–Kindergartners

Focus: Patterns, matching, early math, communication

1. **Use real nature items or pictures** (leaves, rocks, sticks), choosing items that are large, textured, or easy to see and touch.
2. **Create a simple pattern** (for example, leaf–rock–leaf–rock) and invite your child to join in by placing items, pointing, choosing between options, or using eye gaze.
3. **Children can show matching or what comes next** by talking, gesturing, arranging items, using pictures, or a communication device. All ways of participating count.
4. Offer extra time, model simple words (“same,” “again,” “next”), and provide support or adaptive tools as welcomed.



Learning patterns helps children notice what repeats and what comes next, making sense of the world around them. These skills support early math thinking, problem-solving, and memory, and help children feel confident predicting and organizing information.