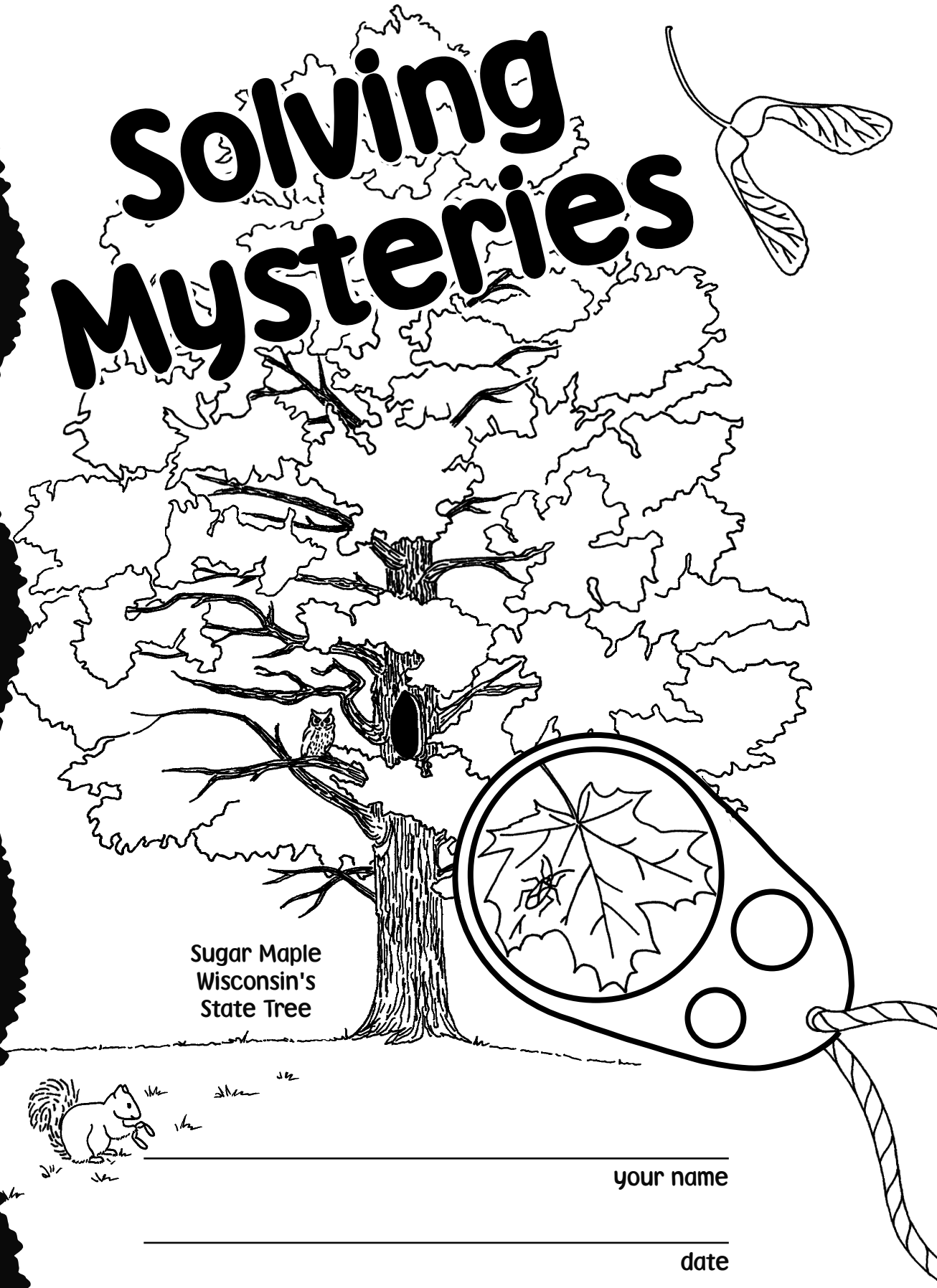
Solving Mysteries

Kids ages 3-5

Wisconsin Explorers



your name

date

name of park

Wisconsin State Parks, Forests, Trails, and Recreation Areas

Have fun! Explore! Collect a patch!

Grown-ups, get ready to spend some quality time outdoors with your favorite preschooler! As an added bonus, your child can earn a colorful patch. Just check off explorations here or on the evaluation form as you do them.

- ❒ We followed footprints (page 3).
- ❒ We made footprints (pages 3-4).
- ❒ We became Tree Detectives (page 6).
- ❒ We looked for animals hiding in trees (page 7).
- ❒ We played with seeds (page 8).
- ❒ We watched the clouds (pages 9-11).
- ❒ We looked at the stars (pages 12-13).
- ❒ We went on an I Spy hike (page 14).
- ❒ We played I Spy Bingo (page 16).
- ❒ We found a special place (pages 17-19).

Explorer Packs Available!
Borrow a pack filled with exploring tools. Ask park staff.

To earn a patch:

- ❒ Complete 5 to 10 of the explorations listed above.
- ❒ Attend a nature program or take a nature hike.
- ❒ Pick up litter or clean up your campsite.
- ❒ Fill out the evaluation form (found on colored center pages of this booklet).

To get a patch (choose one method):

- ❒ Give your evaluation form to a park staff person and tell him/her what you did.
- ❒ Visit the Wisconsin Explorers website. Go to <www.wiparks.net> and search for "Wisconsin Explorers." Complete and submit the evaluation form following the directions on the website. The patch will arrive by mail in 2-4 weeks.
- ❒ Mail the evaluation form, your name and address, and a letter or drawing telling about your explorations to: Wisconsin Explorers PR/6, Department of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. The patch will arrive in 2-4 weeks.

For more information, call (715) 365-8966
or email DNRWisconsinParks@wisconsin.gov

The Wisconsin Explorers program is an interpretive program of the Wisconsin State Park System made possible by the generous support of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin and the following donors: Bong Naturalist Association, Friends of Buckhorn State Park, Friends of Devil's Lake State Park, Friends of Hartman Creek State Park, Friends of Interstate Park, Friends of Kettle Moraine, Inc., Friends of Kohler-Andrae State Park, Friends of New Glarus Woods State Park, Friends of Rock Island State Park, Friends of Whitefish Dunes State Park, Menasha Corporation Foundation, R.D. & Linda Peters Foundation, and one very generous anonymous donor.

Caring for Our Corner of the Earth
Natural Resources FOUNDATION of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Explorers - Solving Mysteries (Ages 3-5)
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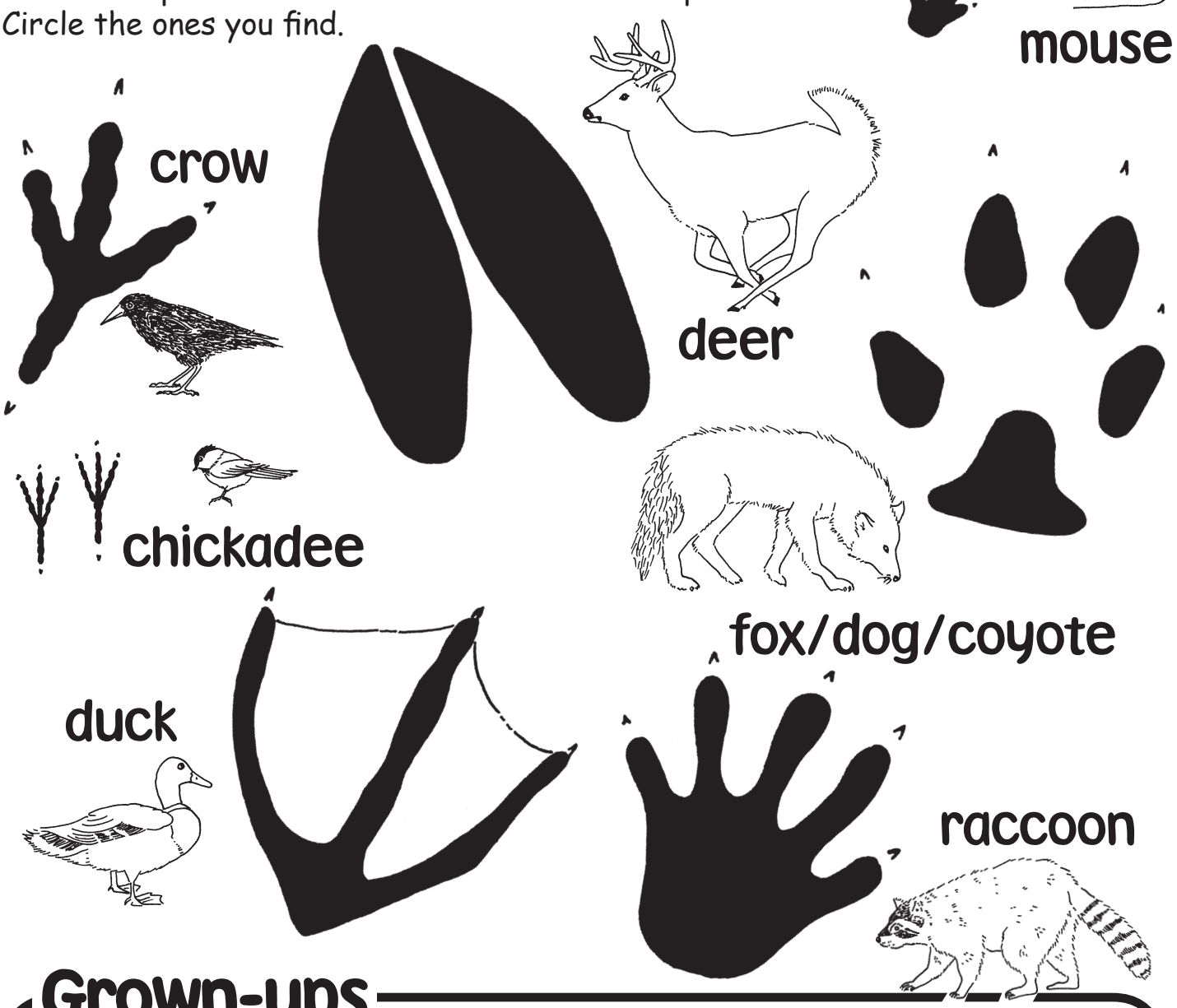
Written and designed by Beth Mittermaier

Follow Footprints

Who lives in the park? Look for footprints in wet, sandy, and muddy places. What do you think the animals were doing? Follow the footprints to solve the mysteries. These footprints are the same size as real footprints. Circle the ones you find.



Grown-ups

Make footprints

Find some water and a sidewalk and make wet footprints with your preschooler. How are his footprints different if he tiptoes? Walks backwards? Dances? Skips? Hops? Try the same experiments in sand and mud. Close your eyes while he makes footprint mysteries. Can you figure out how he made the footprints? Switch places and leave mysteries for him to solve.

Walk like the animals

Can your preschooler hop like a rabbit, waddle like a raccoon, run like a deer, or jump like a frog?

Read a story

In the Woods: Who's Been Here? by Lindsay Barrett George

Little Lost Fox Cub by Louis Espinassous

Chipmunk Song by Joanne Ryder

Make footprints

Make footprints or ask a grown-up to trace around your foot and your shoe. Draw your toes. Draw the pattern on the bottom of your shoe.

barefoot

shoe

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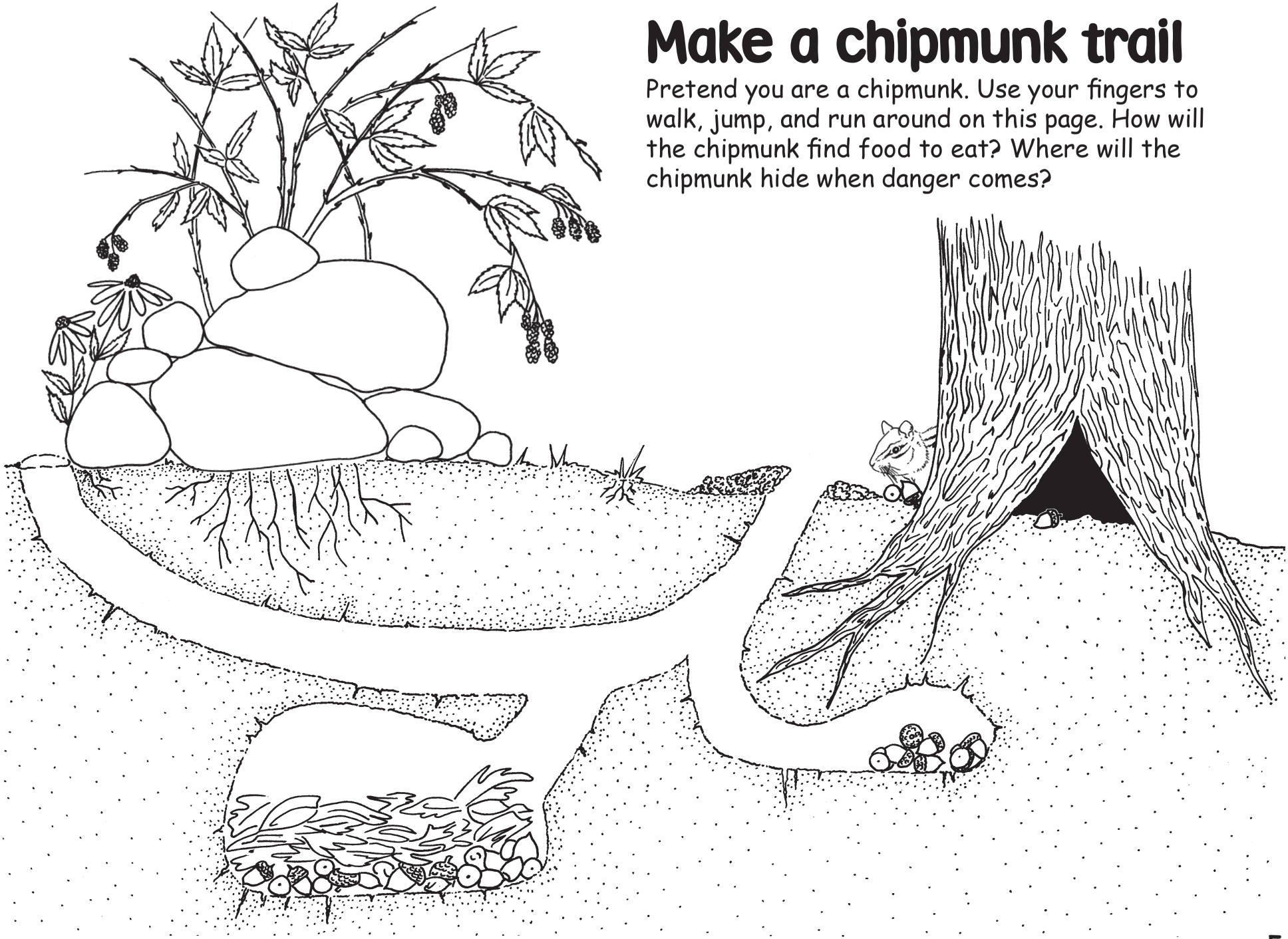
Make a chipmunk trail

Pretend you are a chipmunk. Use your fingers to walk, jump, and run around on this page. How will the chipmunk find food to eat? Where will the chipmunk hide when danger comes?



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Be a Tree Detective

Can you find a shady tree that would make a nice place for a picnic? Can you find a tree that is noisy or quiet? Take a hike and look for interesting trees.

leaf rubbing
from my
favorite tree

Grown-ups

Eat tree foods!

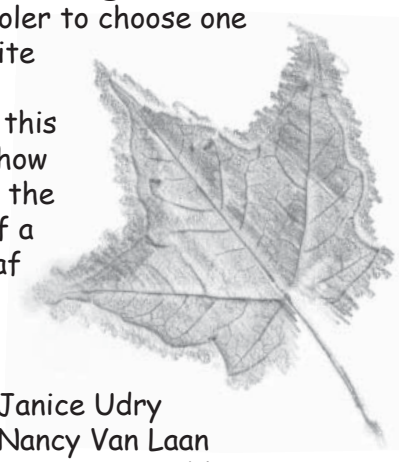
Trees provide us with many fruits, nuts, and spices. How many can you name together? Eat a tree lunch of apples, pears, cherries, oranges, almonds, walnuts, cashews, cinnamon, cloves, or other tree foods. Enjoy your picnic under a shady tree.

Explore tree seeds

Talk about how seeds move to new places to grow, then try to find some examples. Can you find seeds with wings? Seeds that stick to your clothes? Seeds that float on the water? Seeds that float on the breeze? Seeds that birds might eat and transport?

Make a leaf rubbing

Invite your preschooler to choose one leaf from her favorite tree. Place the leaf (vein side up) under this page of the book. Show her how to rub over the leaf with the side of a crayon to make a leaf rubbing.



Read a story

A Tree is Nice by Janice Udry
A Tree for Me by Nancy Van Laan
Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf by Lois Ehlert

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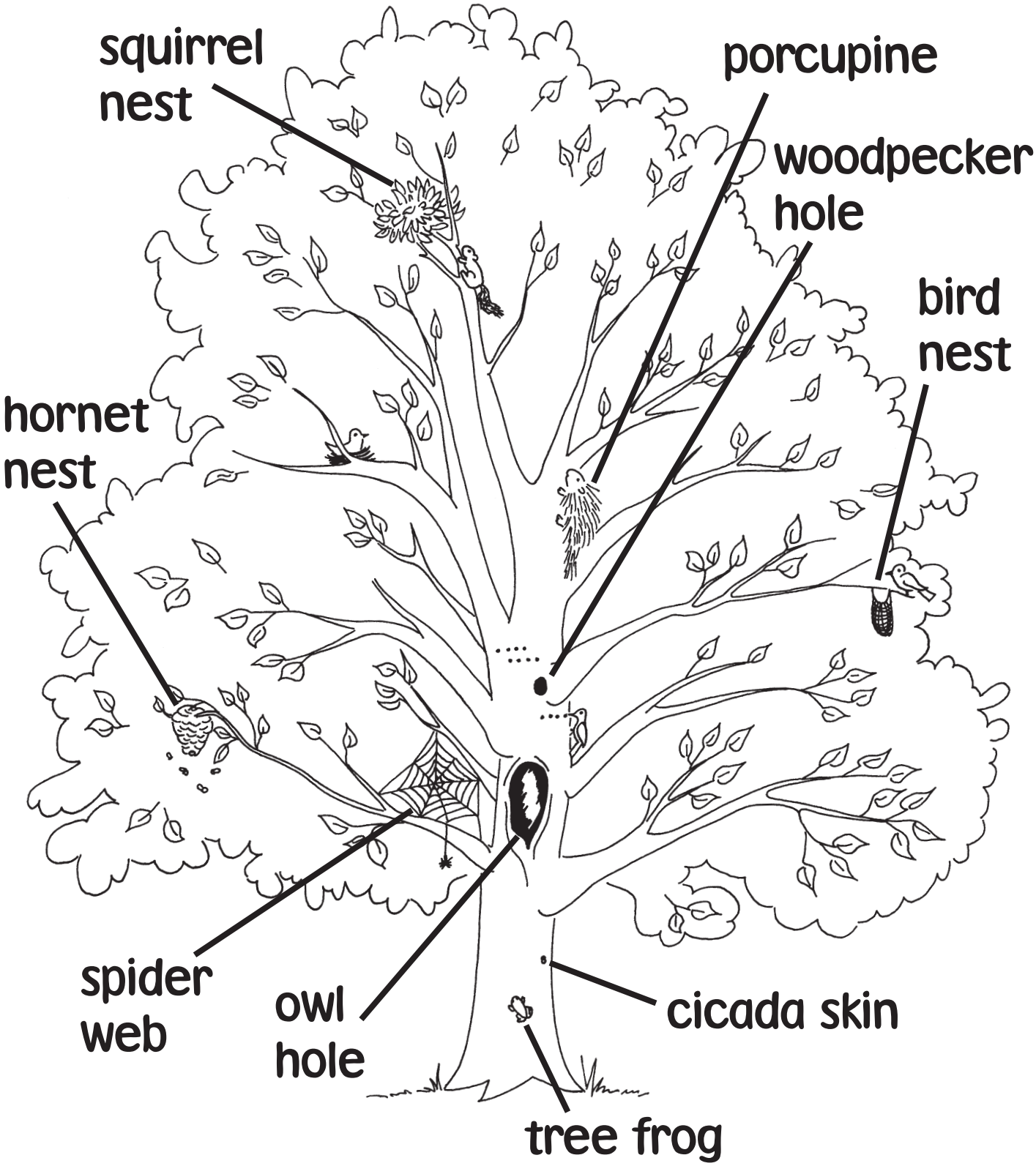
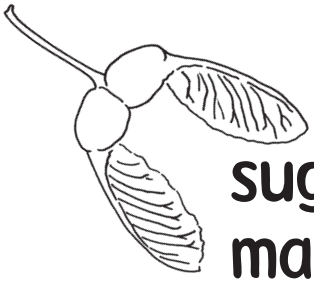
Look for animals hiding in trees

When you first look at a tree, you might not see any animals. Look for clues on the ground around your tree, up in the branches, on the bark, and in the leaves. Circle the clues you see. Add other animals that you find.



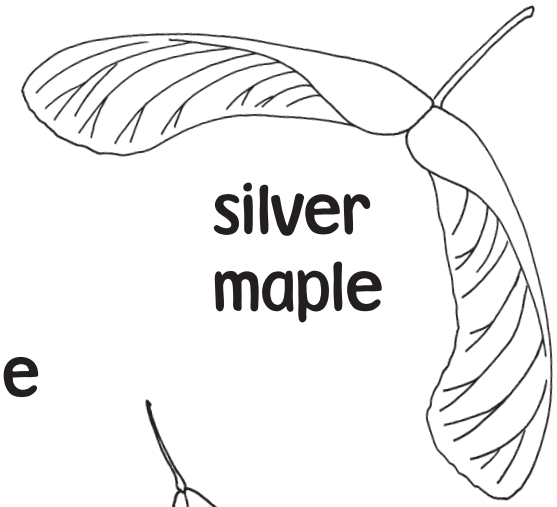
Play with tree seeds

Find some maple seeds and have some fun!

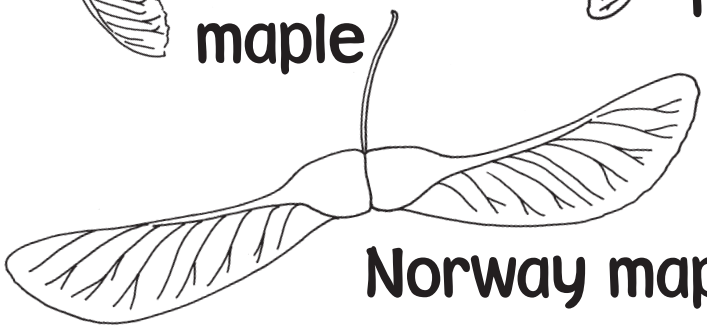


sugar maple

red maple



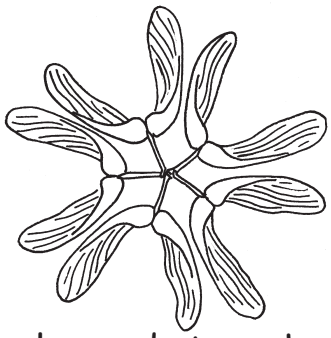
silver maple



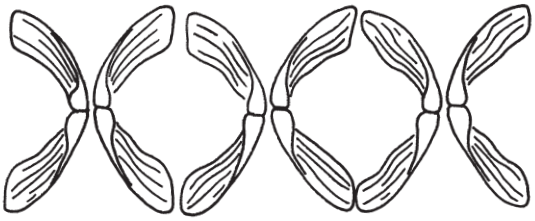
Norway maple

box elder

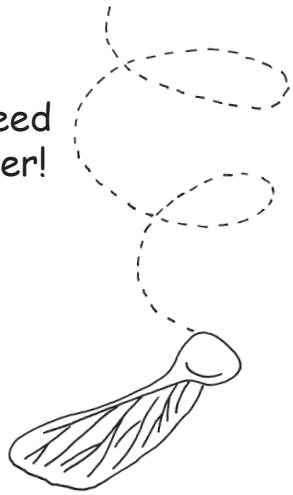
Split open a green maple seed and stick it to each side of your nose!



Use maple seeds to make patterns.



Fly a maple seed helicopter!

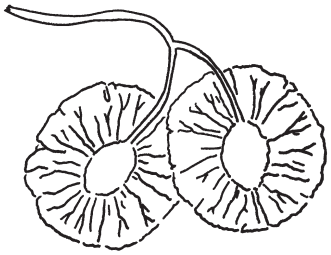


Find more seeds that have wings.
Throw them up in the air and watch how far they fly.

ash

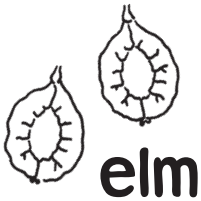
spruce

(These hide in cones!)



hoptree

basswood



elm

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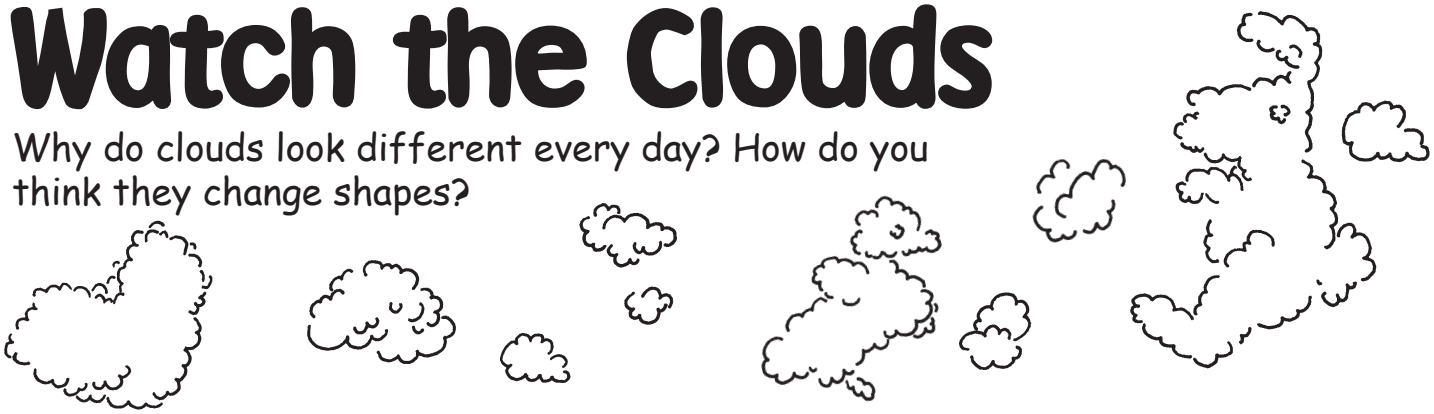
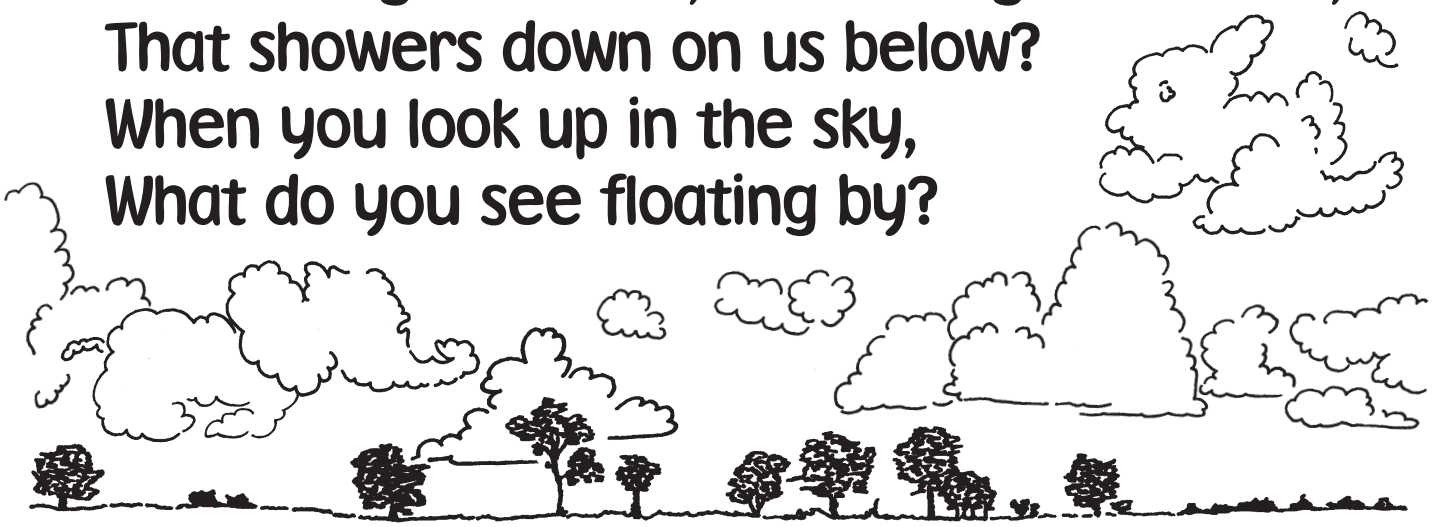
Watch the Clouds

Why do clouds look different every day? How do you think they change shapes?



What's fluffy white and floats up high,
Like piles of ice cream in the sky?
And when the wind blows hard and strong,
What very gently floats along?

What brings the rain, what brings the snow,
That showers down on us below?
When you look up in the sky,
What do you see floating by?



Grown-ups

Talk about the weather

When you are outdoors with your preschooler, talk about the kinds of clouds in the sky. Look for the white, fluffy clouds that bring fair weather; towering, dark clouds that bring storms; and low, thick clouds that bring all-day rains. Watch clouds move with the wind and note their direction and speed.

Read a story

Dreams by Peter Spier
Little Cloud by Eric Carle

Nap in the clouds

Allow your preschooler to make a huge pile of sleeping bags, blankets, jackets, and pillows. If possible, cover the pile with a white sheet. At naptime, he can fall asleep in a cloud.

Eat a cloud

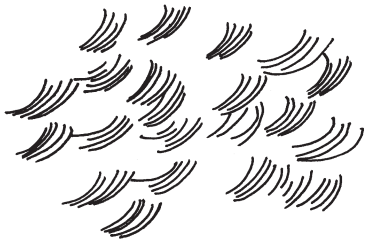
Have "clouds" for lunch: mashed potatoes, drop biscuits, fresh fruit in a "cloud" of whipped cream, and, of course, marshmallows. Toast marshmallows over the campfire and make dark storm clouds!

Find these clouds

While you are at the park, look at the clouds every day.
Color the clouds that you see.

dark blanket

big fluffy



paintbrush

stormy

little puffy

sunset

Watch the weather

How did the sky look at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bedtime?

breakfast	lunch
dinner	bedtime

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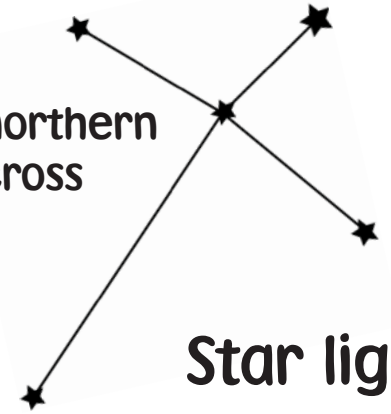
Draw cloud pictures

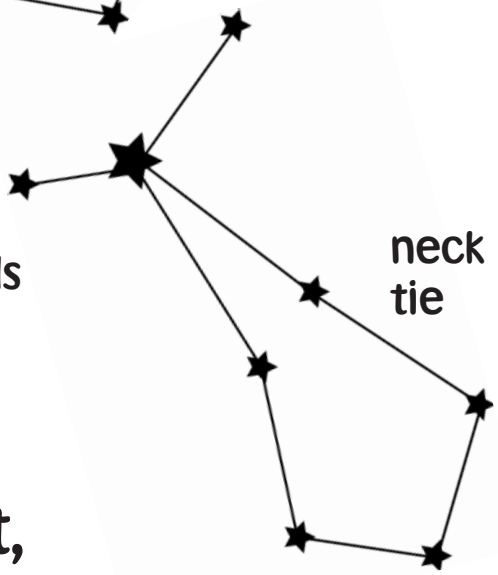
Wait for a sunny day with a blue sky and puffy, white clouds. Do you see any pictures in the clouds? Look for dishes of ice cream, fish, bears, and butterflies. Draw what you see in the clouds.

dragonfly cloud

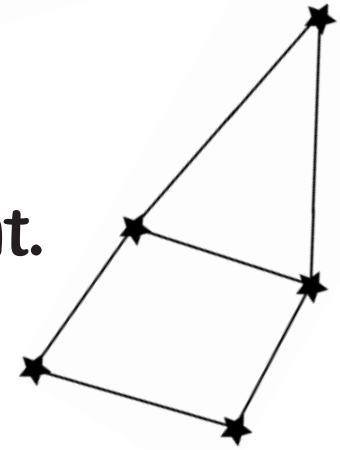
Look at the Stars

Can you find pictures in the sky?





Star light, star bright,
First star I see tonight,
I wish I may, I wish I might,
Have the wish I wish tonight.



Grown-ups

Make "starlight"

After dark, give your preschooler a flashlight along with a strainer, cheese grater, colander, or slotted spoon. Encourage her to shine the light through the objects to make "stars" on the inside of the tent.

Play a star game

Toss a small handful of magic pebbles (stars!) onto dirt or sand. Use a stick to draw lines from pebble to pebble to make pictures.

Watch for the first star

Grab a blanket and some snacks. Then find a comfortable spot away from lights with a good view of the sky. Who will see the first star? Search the sky for imaginary pictures, letters, and numbers. Talk about bright stars and dim stars. Can you see blue stars or red stars?

Read a story

Sky All Around by Anna Grossnickle Hines
How Many Stars in the Sky? by Lenny Hort
I am a Star by Jean Marzollo

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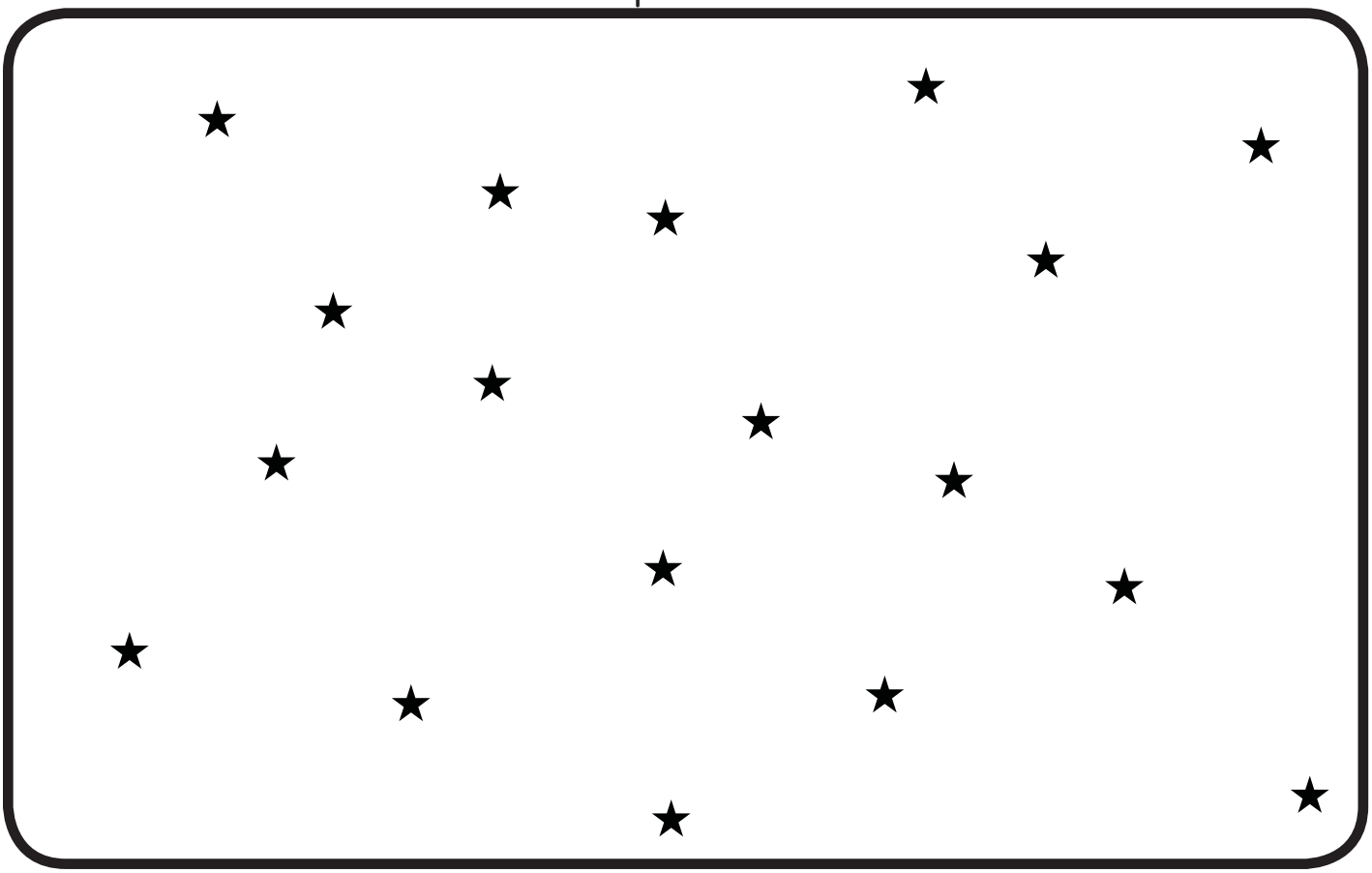
Connect the dots

Draw lines from star to star to make pictures.

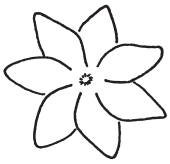


Look for nature stars during the day!

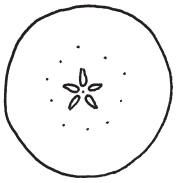
Color the stars that you find. Can you find more?

star berry

star moss

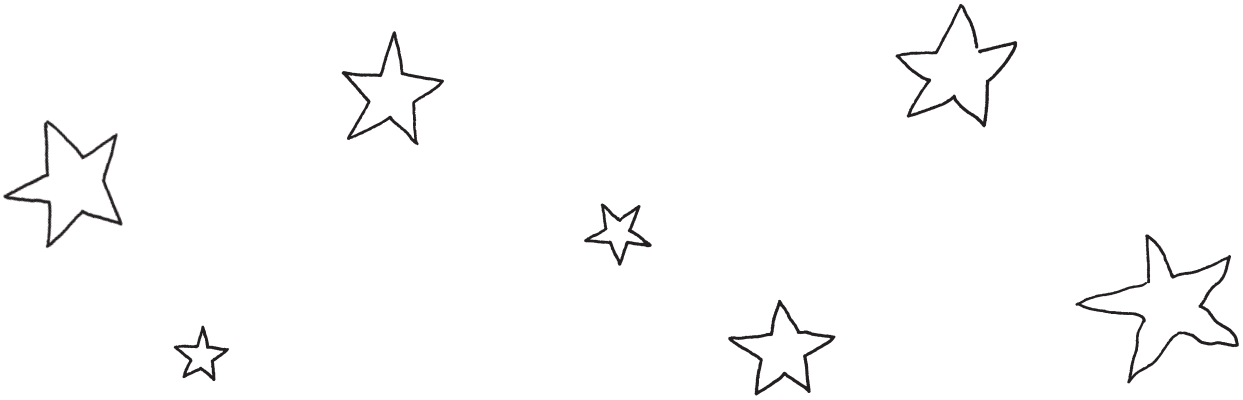


star flower



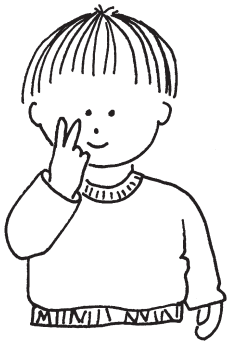
apple star

star leaf



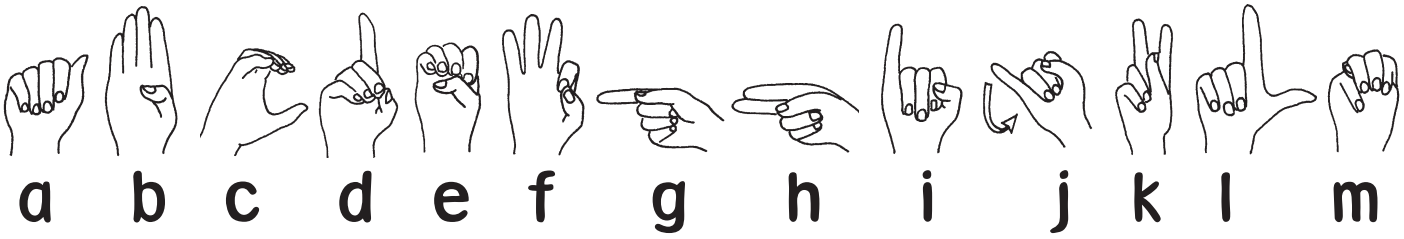
Play "I Spy"

Can you see something that no one else can see?

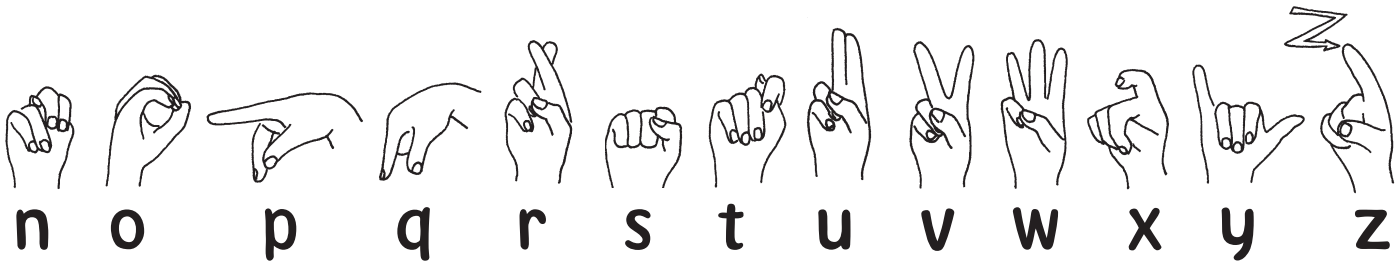


To sign the word "see," make a "V" with your fingers near your eyes. Then move your hand forward.

I spy with my little eye, something that begins with _____.



a b c d e f g h i j k l m



n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Grown-ups

Take an *I Spy* Hike

One person begins by choosing a nearby object (such as a flower) and saying, "I spy with my little eye, something that begins with the letter F." Make the American Sign Language sign for the letter "f" as shown above. The other players guess what the object is. The first person to guess correctly gets to choose the next object. You can play *I Spy* with letters, letter sounds, colors, shapes, or locations.

Play Kim's Game

Collect about five easily-found nature items and hide them under a handkerchief or towel. Remember not to pick living plants. Lift the cloth and tell your preschooler to look carefully at the items. After about one minute, cover the items and encourage him to find one of each.

Take your own *I Spy* pictures

Choose sand, moss, pine needles, or grass for a background. With your preschooler, collect 5 - 10 interesting natural objects to place on the background. Take a digital picture. When you get home, you can play ***I Spy***!

Look for things that don't belong in nature

As you hike, pick up litter that you find along the trail and throw it in a garbage can. Your actions will make a huge impression on your preschooler.

Read a story

I Spy Little Animals by Jean Marzollo and Walter Wick

Nature Spy by Shelley Rotner and Ken Kreisler

What Joe Saw by Anna Grossnickle Hines

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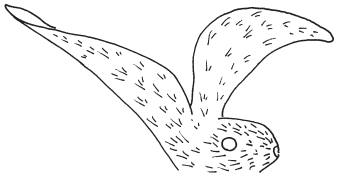
Look for

In this big picture, find . . .



acorn

butterfly

rabbit head

ant

feather

mushroom

raspberry

dragonfly

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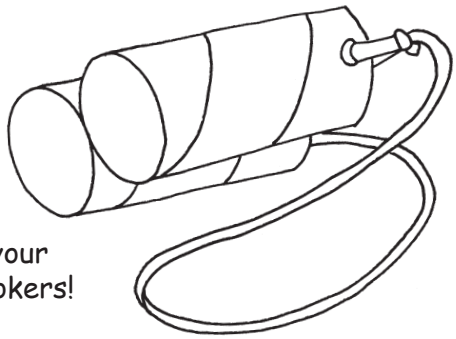
Play *I Spy* bingo

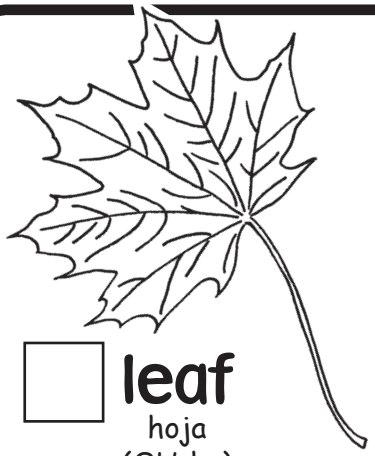
Make some "outdoor lookers," then go on a hike. When you find something, mark it and say its name in Spanish. Remember to leave nature where you find it!

Tape, glue, or rubberband two toilet paper tubes together.



Add a string to make a necklace, if you wish.

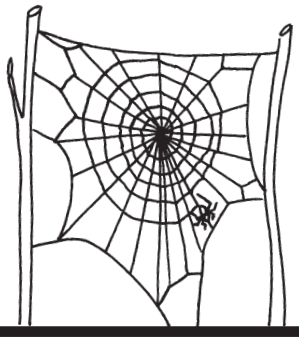
Decorate your outdoor lookers!

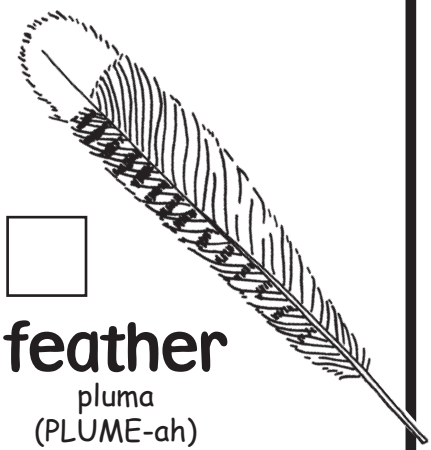


☐ **leaf**
hoja
(OH-ha)

☐ **cone**
cono
(KOH-no)

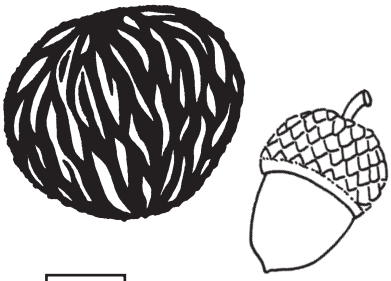
☐ **spider web**
tela de araña
(TAY-lah day uh-RON-yuh)





☐ **feather**
pluma
(PLUME-ah)

☐ **rock**
roca
(ROW-kah)

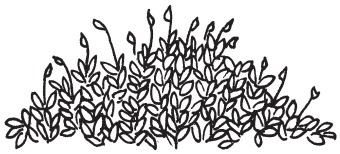


☐ **nut**
tuerca
(too-AIR-kah)

☐ **berry**
baya
(BYE-uh)

☐ **flower**
flor
(floor)

☐ **moss**
musgo
(MOOSE-go)



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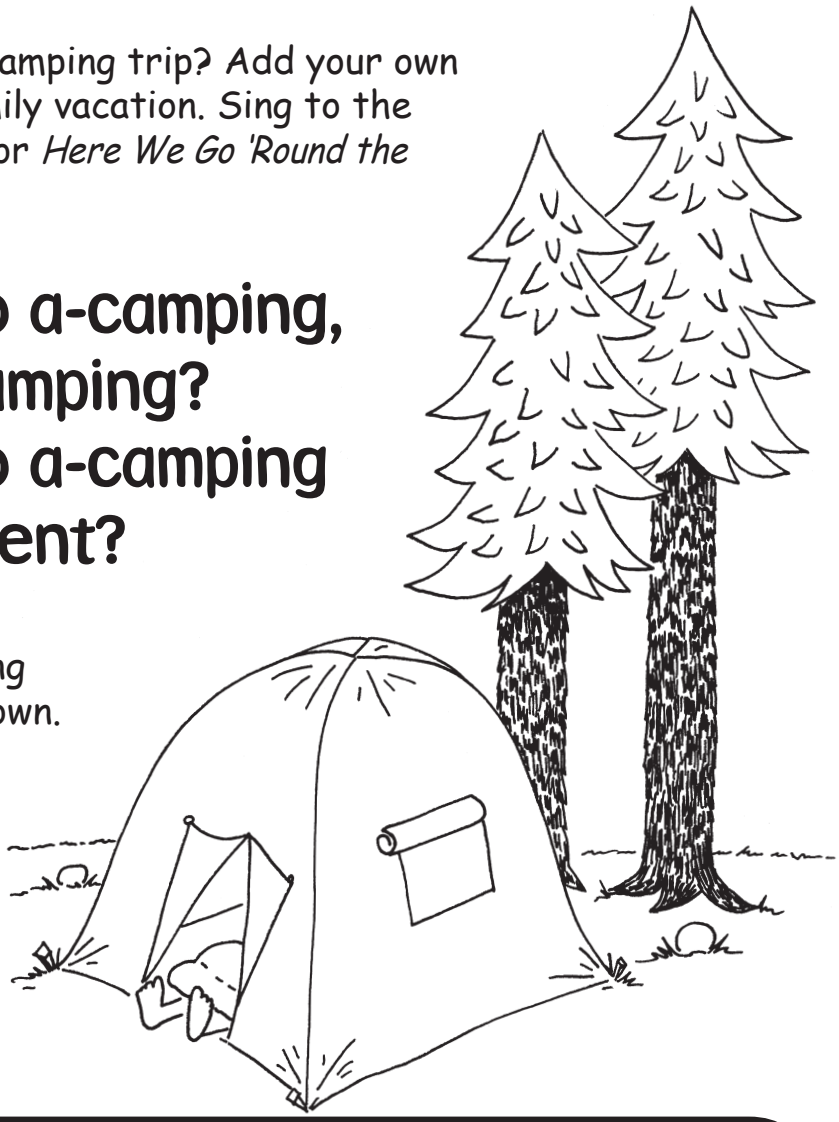
Find a Special Place

When you visit a park with your family, what are your favorite things to do, and where are your favorite places to go? Do you have a favorite trail? Do you like fishing on the dock with a friend? Or is your favorite time in the evening when everyone is tucked into sleeping bags and telling stories?

Sing a song

What did you see and do on your camping trip? Add your own verses to help remember your family vacation. Sing to the tune of *The More We Get Together* or *Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush*.

Did you ever go a-camping,
a-camping, a-camping?
Did you ever go a-camping
and sleep in a tent?



Replace the fourth line of the song with these lines or make up your own.

...and see a raccoon?
...and hike in the woods?
...and fish with a pole?
...and cook on a fire?

Grown-ups

Talk about special places

Spend some time remembering the special places of your own childhood. Share your memories with your preschooler. Be specific about what you like about outdoor places and why you enjoy spending time in nature.

Enjoy a picnic

Let your preschooler choose a special place to have a picnic on the last day of your camping trip.

Read a story

S is for S'mores by Helen Foster James
Secret Place by Eve Bunting

Say your ABCs

Get your family together and make an ABC list of your favorite park vacation things. Your list could include places you've visited, things you've seen while hiking, foods you like to eat while camping, or equipment you need to go exploring.

U is for Under the stars

A _____ N _____

B _____ O _____

C _____ P _____

D _____ Q _____

E _____ R _____

F _____ S _____

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© 2010 WI Department of Natural Resources - Wisconsin Explorers - Solving Mysteries (Ages 3-5)

Remember your special place

Of all the places you've visited in the park, what place do you like the best?

Attach a photo or draw a picture here.

I like this place because . . . .

Exploring nature is fun, easy, and good for you!

It's time to **Get Outdoors! Wisconsin**! Did you know that actively exploring in the outdoors reduces stress, helps fight obesity, increases creativity, and improves performance at school and work?

The Wisconsin State Park System invites you to. . .

Get Outdoors! Wisconsin to play and explore. Find events, activities, and materials to get you started. Go to <www.wiparks.net> and look for Get Outdoors! Wisconsin.

Attend nature programs to discover the natural and cultural resources around you. Visit <www.wiparks.net> for a statewide calendar of programs.

Follow trails, paths, or sidewalks and see what you find along the way. You'll find 99 state parks, trails, forests, and recreation areas at <www.wiparks.net>

Borrow nature exploration tools. Many state properties have exploration cards, backpacks, magnifying lenses, and other equipment for loan. Ask at the park office.

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