

Nature by the Season Preschool & Kindergarten

WINTER



Topics Covered:

birds, trees, hibernation, animal signs
snow and ice, winter colors, wind, clouds,
moon and stars, plants and more!

Introduction

God is so cool. He gives us nature in so much depth and glory that adults can study it for years and years without learning everything. He also gives us nature in such sweet beauty and simplicity that even a preschooler can understand.

Preschoolers and kindergarteners are naturally inclined to love nature because of their inquisitiveness, active bodies and keen eyes for finding things unique and often hidden. I have watched my own little ones become some of my best nature buddies because they are always ready for the adventure and excitement. That's why I've created this series of nature studies for you. I know your preschooler or kindergartener is up for the adventure, too, and is ready and willing to become your nature buddy!

Getting your little one outdoors early with a zest for discovering God's creation will set him up with a life-long desire to know God more and grow closer to Him. He already has a child-like faith in God; why not cement it into a deep adult faith as you introduce him to God's marvels and miracles through nature?

As you go through this book of winter nature ideas with your child, it's my sincere prayer that these won't merely be activities to keep your little one occupied. I hope you will use these activities to talk about God and His wonders every chance you get. Explanations as simple as, "God made the snow. Isn't it beautiful?" will go a long way in building a foundation of knowing the Lord as your child grows!



Nature Bags

Keep nature bags very simple, or even nonexistent. Little ones appreciate spontaneous adventures way more than the carefully thought out materials you might pack. Most of the walks I've suggested will require nothing. Otherwise, simply pack along the item or two you need in a small bag. Some of you may desire to pack a nature field guide, a notebook and/or colored pencils to encourage early nature notebooking, but these are not necessary.

Safety

Participating in nature walks with your young child is a must! There are too many dangers to allow little people to go off on their own.

Since preschoolers and kindergarteners often still discover their world through the senses, be sure to explain that we never eat or touch things in nature unless an adult says it's okay. (It's not okay to eat anything other than garden fruits and veggies when outdoors. It's also not okay to touch any fungi, since young children aren't conscious about keeping hands out of their mouths. Beware of poisonous plants and dangerous animals, too.)

Watch for areas that could pose a risk to little ones like cliffs, holes, falling limbs/rocks, water, etc. Don't worry - as long as you're with your child, the risks are very minimal. I just want to make you aware of the potential dangers, especially if your child wanders off alone.

And finally, since we're talking about winter study, it's very important to dress appropriately for the weather. Make sure you dress warmly, in layers, and don't stay outside too long. Be especially watchful on and near ice as it can be very hazardous. Also be aware of possible danger if icicles are pointed or have the potential to fall from a gutter, for instance.

Field Trips

When the weather is way too cold to get outside, don't assume you have to skip nature time. Try taking field trips! Visit a terrarium, planetarium, conservatory, aquarium, plant nursery, pet store, or even the zoo. Ask places such as these to place you on their mailing list as many of them offer themed classes for young children, too!

How to Use this Book

Before moving on to the activity ideas, you'll notice I've included a lengthy list of **living literature**. I believe literature connections are paramount to the overall understanding of any subject for young children. Because of this, I strongly encourage you to read at least one book with your child for each of the topics you choose to teach.

I also encourage the use of field guides when appropriate. Unfortunately, most field guides aren't made for preschoolers or kindergarteners. I've come up with a short list of acceptable field guides that can be easily adapted to give your child exposure to nature identification. Although it probably won't be an issue at this early age, beware that almost all field guides will discuss "millions of years" at some point.

You'll find the nature ideas and activities are divided into five main sections:

- **Weather**
- **Sky**
- **Animals**
- **Plants**
- **Ground**

Within each section you will find the following topics:

- **Weather**
 - **Snow**
 - **Ice**
 - **Frost**
 - **Wind**
- **Sky**
 - **Clouds**
 - **Sun**
 - **Moon**
 - **Stars**
- **Animals**
 - **Birds**
 - **Active Animals and Hibernation**
 - **Animal Tracks and Signs**
- **Plants**
 - **Deciduous Trees**



- Evergreens
- Small Plants
- Ground
 - Rocks
 - Soil

Within each subtopic, you will find a few nature walk suggestions, each with at least one follow-up activity to do indoors. Sometimes it's a game, experiment or recipe; other times it's a worksheet. The worksheets can be found at the end of each nature topic section. Please don't feel obligated to do the follow-up activities - just exploring nature is enough! Young children typically love to keep learning as long as it's interesting, so I've tried to seize those moments with these additional activities. For ease of use the outdoor activities are highlighted in light blue, and the follow-up activities are indented underneath.



I have chosen not to include outdoor notebooking pages because little ones need to experience nature in very tactile ways. Most of them are not ready for recording things from their walks just yet. However, if your child seems interested, by all means encourage nature notebooking! Just be sure you never force it. Nature notebooking should be a joy. If you force it now, your child may grow to hate it when he can actually draw and write well. For now, have a blank notebook ready if the desire strikes.

You will, then, find the outdoor suggestions to be very hands-on and active, engaging all the wonder of children and involving their senses. This is how they learn about their world! I have included several leading questions and often have included rich vocabulary that you might want to begin using in conversations. Little ones can pick up so much through simple, yet rich discussions with their parents!

Living Literature

Visit the Shining Dawn Books a-store to learn more about each individual title.

General Winter Books

Winter is the Warmest Season by Lauren Stringer
It's Winter! by Linda Glaser
Winter Is by Ann Dixon
Winter's Tale by Robert Sabuda
Winter Lullaby by Barbara Seuling
Winter: An Alphabet Acrostic by William Schnur



Weather

Snowballs by Lois Ehlert
The Jacket I Wear in the Snow by Shirley Neitzel
The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost
Snow by Cynthia Rylant
Snow by Nancy Wallace
Hello Snow by Hope Vestergaard
Who Likes the Snow? by Etta Kaner
The Story of Snow by Mark Cassino
Katy and the Big Snow by Virginia Lee Burton
Snow Pumpkin by Carol Schaefer
Snow Music by Lynne Rae Perkins
Millions of Snowflakes by Mary McKenna Siddals
It's Snowy Today by Kristin Sterling
Snow on Snow on Snow by Chery Chapman
Snowy, Blowy Winter by Bob Raczka
The Wind Blew by Pat Hutchins
Gilberto and the Wind by Marie Hall Ets
Who Likes the Wind by Etta Kaner
Feel the Wind by Author Dorros
The First Day of Winter by Denise Fleming

Sky

Little Cloud by Eric Carle
It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles Shaw
The Sun's Asleep Behind the Hill by Paul Zelinsky
Owl Moon by Jane Yolen
Goose Moon by Carolyn Arden
Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star by DK Publishing
Seeing Stars by Dandi Mackall
Moon Glowing by Elizabeth Partridge

Animals

Once you start looking, you'll be surprised at the number of animals that are still out and about in winter. Even though many have migrated to warmer areas or are sleeping the winter away, you should be able to catch glimpses of many varieties of birds, rabbits, squirrels, mice, and maybe even the occasional deer, fox or beaver. Careful observers will be able to find signs that animals have been about and maybe even burrows and dens!



Appropriate for all animal activities:

Keep an observation mural. As you see various birds or mammals, place a photo of the animal on a poster board. Label the pictures with simple names. If you're unable to take photographs, use a color copier to print a photo from a field guide or the Internet.

Play winter dress up. After several experiences noticing how animals are dressed for the winter (activities to follow), provide a dress up box of winter items and talk about how humans prepare for colder weather. You can use things such as boots, hats, gloves earmuffs, scarves (with adult supervision!), coats, etc. so your child can practice dressing and undressing from winter gear.

Learning with the Birds

Birds naturally spark the curiosity of young children. Since they are so abundantly available to observe in all seasons, it makes them wonderful learning specimens. And it's all the better that you can bring them up close and personal by placing bird feeders right outside your window!

Set up a bird observatory in your home. Near a window, place bird feeders outside. Once you start this project, you'll need to continue feeding the birds through the winter since they will become dependent on your offerings. Inside, place a cozy chair, some binoculars, a simple bird identification guide and a bird coloring book. Encourage your child to spend quiet time observing the birds. What are they doing? Where do they go? What colors can you see? Do any other animals visit the feeders?

Make an easy recipe for the birds. Spread peanut butter over a leftover corn cob. Roll it in birdseed and tie a string around the top. Hang your birdfeeder in the window to see which birds like it best.

Notice how birds fly. Birds use wings to fly. How do the wings move? Do the wings move when the birds eat? Where do the wings go when they are at rest? What other animals do you know that fly?

Make animal movements. Pretend to fly. Talk about other animals that fly - like insects and bats. Talk about the movements of other types of animals such as crawling, slithering, jumping, gliding, walking, hopping, galloping, etc. Pretend to be other animals and make these movements. Use the **sorting page** at the end of this section to decide which animals fly and which do not.

Notice the fluffiness of winter birds. Most birds will look obviously puffed up during the winter because they literally fluff their feathers to add extra air as insulation. Sometimes you can also see birds shiver or huddle together with other birds to keep warm.

Complete a feather experiment. To see if feathers really can keep a bird warm, place ice in two ziptop baggies. Have your preschooler hold both her hands out flat. Place feathers (that you can find in the craft section of most discount stores) in one hand and nothing in the other. Then lay a baggie of ice on both hands. The hand with feathers should stay warm, while the bare hand should become cold quickly. Talk about how feathers (and fur on other animals) protect them from the cold.



Paint with feathers. After the experiment, have fun using the feathers as paint brushes!

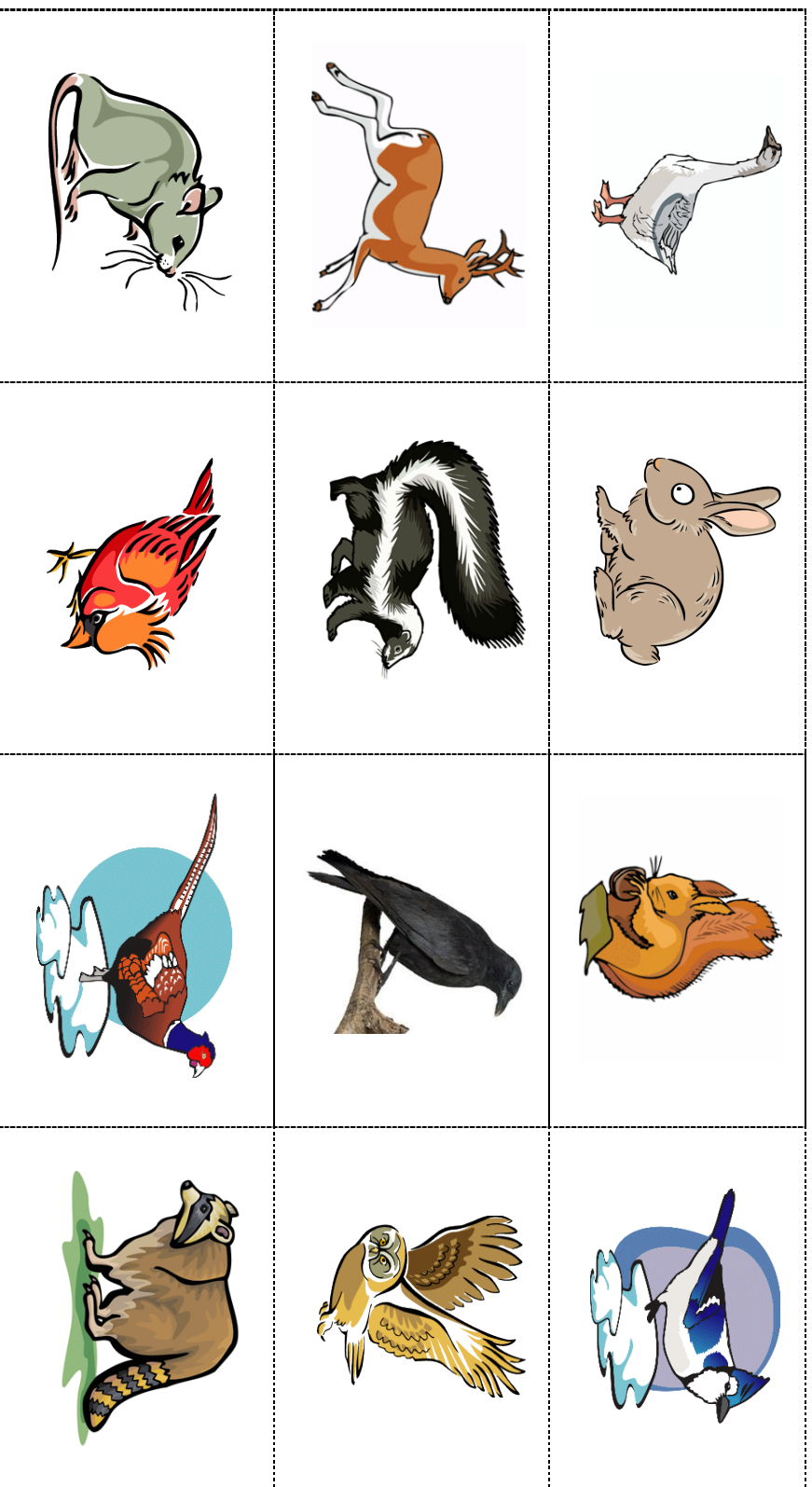
Learning about Active Animals and Hibernation

Watch for animals that are still active. If you've set up a bird observatory as mentioned in the previous section, you'll likely be able to see other animals from a cozy chair, too. You might catch a glimpse or two of animals as you go on a winter walk, but they're pretty shy creatures. What are the animals doing? Where do they go? Does their fur seem to be fluffy or thick?

Play with plastic animals in rice. Discount stores usually sell bags of small plastic animals inexpensively. Give your child a bin of rice ("snow") and several animals for some dramatic play.

Use the cut-outs on the following page to classify birds and mammals on the chart below.

Birds	Mammals



Cut these pieces apart to use on the Birds or Mammals chart.

