



September 2009

Dear Family,

During the next few months, our class will be learning about the relationships between plants and animals as part of our science unit, Ecosystems. We will be creating model ecosystems to observe the interactions between plants and animals and the environment. We will also be learning about the effects of pollution and other human impacts on ecosystems.

We know that children do better in school when their families are actively involved in their learning. Here is one activity that you can do with your child at home to strengthen both your own and your child's understanding of the ecosystems in your community.

Family Activity: Take a family trip around your yard or to a nearby park. Challenge your child to observe as many animals, from insects to birds and mammals, as possible. Look under shrubs and rocks, but be sure that the animals are not disturbed but left in the area where they are found. Discuss the things that these animals need in order to be healthy and to survive. Sometimes insects may cause a negative reaction in humans, but help your child respect all animals and realize that each one has a role to play in keeping the environment healthy.

Challenge your child to observe as many different types of plants as possible in the area. Talk about the structure that plants have in common: leaves, a stem and roots. If your child is not sure if something is a plant or not, ask her/him if it has leaves, a stem and roots. Talk about what plants need in order to grow and reproduce.

I am always eager to have family members come in and share their knowledge and experience related to our units of study. If you have a skill or experience related to the study of plants and/or animals and their relationship to the environment that you would be willing to share with us, please call or email me.

Attached to this letter is a sheet with many suggestions for supporting your child's science understandings at school, at home, and around the Seattle area. Please keep this sheet and take advantage of the suggestions as often as possible!

Thank you very much for all you do for your child.

Sincerely,

## Family Strategies for Supporting Science

### At School

- Talk to your child's science teacher about how your child is doing in class.
- Chaperone a science field trip.
- Volunteer to inventory a science kit for the teacher.
- Volunteer in your child's science class.

### At Home

- Encourage your child to ask questions about the world as much as possible, and avoid giving answers. Encourage observation, exploration, investigation, or research instead.
- Ask your child thoughtful questions and teach her to provide evidence for her thinking by using the word "because" in her explanation (I think the fish is dead *because* it is floating upside down.).
- Encourage your child to draw detailed, colorful, labeled illustrations of things he is observing at home or school.
- Read non-fiction books together in your family's home language.
- Read the newspaper together: talk about a science-related article.
- Talk about the natural history of your country of heritage (e.g., Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines, Mt. Fuji in Japan, tsunami in southeast Asia, Himalayas in India, Great Rift Valley in Eastern Africa).
- Cook together: talk about what you are doing as you are cooking.
- Work together in the garden: plant vegetables, start a family compost or a worm bin.
- Go through a kitchen cabinet: talk about which foods are good for you and which aren't; look at the ingredients and nutritional information on labels.
- Have your child help with small (and safe) repairs around the house.
- Find safe experiments to do together at home.  
([www.exploratorium.edu/science\\_explorer/](http://www.exploratorium.edu/science_explorer/) has a great list)
- Listen to "Science Friday" on National Public Radio together.  
(Fridays, 8-10pm on KUOW 94.9 FM)
- Choose appropriate science-related programs on TV to watch with your child:  
Public Television (KCTS, Channel 9)  
Discovery Channel  
Animal Planet Channel  
National Geographic Channel  
Nature Channel
- Choose appropriate science-related websites to view with your child:  
Bill Nye, The Science Guy ([www.nyelabs.com](http://www.nyelabs.com))  
How Stuff Works ([www.howstuffworks.com](http://www.howstuffworks.com))  
Cool Science for Curious Kids ([www.hhmi.org/coolscience](http://www.hhmi.org/coolscience))  
Extreme Science ([www.extremescience.net](http://www.extremescience.net))  
Cool Cosmos (<http://coolcosmos.ipac.caltech.edu>)  
Science News for Kids ([www.sciencenewsforkids.com](http://www.sciencenewsforkids.com))  
Mt. St. Helen's Cam (<http://www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/volcanocams/msh/>)

## In the Seattle Area

- Go for a walk around your neighborhood: talk about how people have changed the natural environment in positive and negative ways; come up with ideas for how your family could make more positive changes in your neighborhood; talk about the landforms you see and how they were formed (e.g., Mt. Rainier).
- Go to the public library: find books about animals, insects, inventions, electricity, natural disasters, space.
- Go to the beach at low tide (e.g., Lincoln Park, Alki Beach, Carkeek Park).
- Take a trip to the...

Pacific Science Center      206.443.2001      ([www.pacificsciencecenter.org](http://www.pacificsciencecenter.org))

Woodland Park Zoo      206.684.4800      ([www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org))

Seattle Aquarium      206.386.4300      ([www.seattleaquarium.org](http://www.seattleaquarium.org))

Seattle Children's Museum      206.441.1768      ([www.thechildrensmuseum.org](http://www.thechildrensmuseum.org))

Museum of Flight      206.764.5720      ([www.museumofflight.org](http://www.museumofflight.org))

Admission is free the first Thursday of every month

Science Fiction Museum      206.724.3428      ([www.sfhomeworld.org](http://www.sfhomeworld.org))

Admission is free from 5-8pm the first Thursday of every month

Burke Museum      206.543.5590      ([www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/](http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/))

Mount Saint Helens      360.449.7800      ([www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/mshnvm/](http://www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/mshnvm/))

Mt. Rainier National Park      360.569.2211      ([www.nps.gov/mora/](http://www.nps.gov/mora/))

Univ. of WA Arboretum      206.543.8800      (<http://depts.washington.edu/wpa/>)

Tours at 1pm on first and third Sundays each month (meet at Graham Visitor's Center). Information about rental of self-guided packs on-line.

Volunteer Park Conservatory      206.684.4743

([www.cityofseattle.net/parks/parkspaces/VolunteerPark/conservatory.htm](http://www.cityofseattle.net/parks/parkspaces/VolunteerPark/conservatory.htm))

## Camps & Classes

- Find out about the Pacific Science Center camp every summer in Seattle. Scholarships are available. (206.443.2925)  
[www.cmiregistration.com/user/org/category.jxp?id=2367&org=135](http://www.cmiregistration.com/user/org/category.jxp?id=2367&org=135)
- Coyote Central offers year-round classes for 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade students that include science and technology-related activities such as cooking, building soapbox derby cars, welding, glass blowing, robotics, and lots more. Scholarships are available. (206.323.7276) [www.coyotecentral.org/](http://www.coyotecentral.org/)