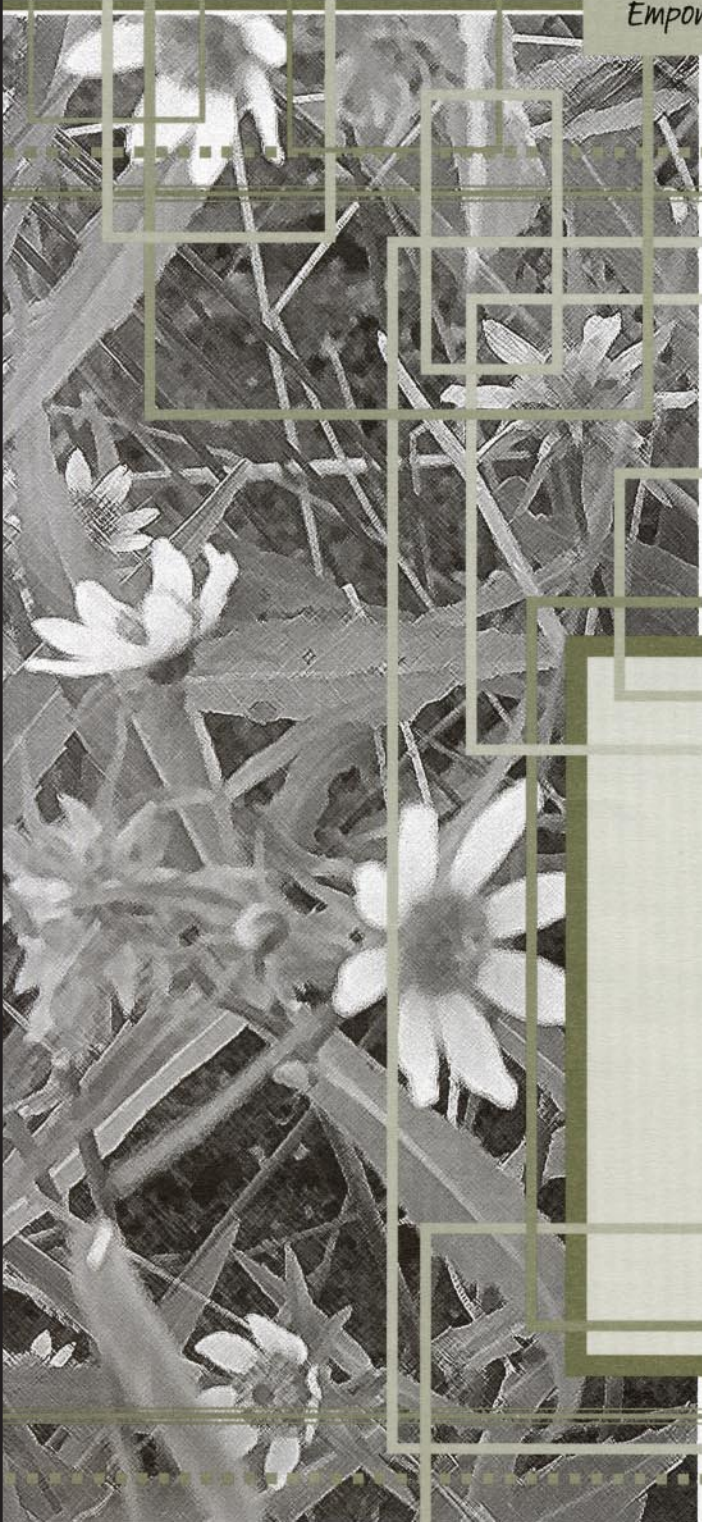


PEACE

24/7

Empowering Youth to Be Ministers of Peace and Justice



Hear Nature's Stories



Become Aware

In the Disney movie, *The Lion King*, the song "Circle of Life" speaks of the interconnectedness between all creation. Native Americans look upon the earth as an intricate part of their circle of life. "Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. If we spit on the ground, we spit on ourselves. This we know. The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth" (Chief Seattle). Similar wisdom can be found in the traditions of native cultures on every continent.

Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying, "We are sister and brother to animals and plants, water and soil, earth and sky." It is by accepting such a personal relationship that we will be able to accept our stewardship in the circle of life. An important step in doing this is to listen and learn from the stories and lessons nature has to tell. Today's world is flooded with the promise of advancements that threaten the very existence of Earth's resources. Now, more than ever, we must seek harmony within creation's circle of life. From the tiniest bug to the whales in the sea, from the seedling to the giant tree, life speaks of the greatness of God.

THOUGHTS FOR REFLECTION

Acknowledge Responsibility

Imagine that you are on top of a summit, overlooking a vista of peaks and valleys. After a rain, the sweet smell of flowers mixes with mountain pines and wet grasses. A soft mist continues to fall upon your face. Rushing beside you, a stream flows steadily over the rocks, splashing ice-cold water on your dangling toes. A vibrant rainbow paints the sky with the promise of new life. Birds are busy gathering the worms drawn to the surface by the rain. In the distance you can hear the voices of their babies waiting for dinner. A tiny ground squirrel peeks its head over a rock, looks around, then quickly darts back when her eyes meet yours. The rainbow silently disappears as the sun begins to set. Rays of yellow and red streak the sky with a radiance so strong you feel as if you can grab it. The power of God's love is all around you. Listen. Feel. Know. Hear the stories nature has to tell.

What are the stories teaching you? Are you ready to listen? Are you ready to be a friend who cares?

Psalm 19:1—4 NIV

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of [God's] hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Psalm 96:11—12 NIV

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy.

Psalm 148 adapted NRSV

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens above.
Praise the Lord, sun and moon, all shining stars.
Praise the Lord, you waters above the skies.
Praise the Lord, you sea creatures and all ocean depths.
Praise the Lord, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds.
Praise the Lord, mountains and hills, fruit trees and all cedars.
Praise the Lord, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds.
Praise the Lord, young men and maidens, old men and women, girls and boys.
Praise the Lord!

Parables of Nature

Jesus often used nature as a tool for teaching God's messages. For example in Mark 4:30-32 (4:24-25 IV) Jesus shared the parable of the mustard seed. Check the stories found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Find lessons that Jesus built around nature. What are the many stories nature has to tell?

Acquire More Understanding

Hear the Song

Make a recording of the many voices of nature (songs of birds, running streams, rustling wheat, ocean waves).

Share Your Secret

Describe your favorite place to go and be among nature. What makes it special? What stories does it have to tell? What responsibilities is it asking you to take? Write your answers down or share them with a partner.

See the Faces

Spend time among nature. Draw, photograph, or create a video about the many faces of creation (trees, flowers, sun, stars, oceans, streams, fish, eagle, fox, and lion). Include those that are sad and in need of help as well as the joyful.

Brother Sun, Sister Moon


Watch the movie *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* to understand more about Francis of Assisi's connection to nature.

Gifts of the Earth

Make a list of gifts that come from nature. Create a second list of gifts you can give back to nature.

Bring it Home

Spend time in the library. Check magazines, books, and the Internet for a better understanding of the concerns facing the world and all creation within it. Concentrate on issues that are most relevant to the area where you live. Interview park officials, conservationists, teachers, and long-time residents of your community. How have they seen the environment of your area change? What do they feel is the greatest threat to the peace of your community's environment? What do they believe needs to be done about it?



Take Action

- Ask a conservationist to talk about environmental concerns in your area.
- Write your own song of praise about the beauty of nature.
- Create a simple storybook based on the stories nature has to tell. Illustrate it with photos from nature.
- Make a closer connection with the earth by planting and nurturing a small flower or vegetable garden.
- Find ways to enhance the natural beauty of your community.
- On a day with lofty clouds in the sky, lay on the ground and watch the shapes created by the clouds.
- Subscribe to a conservation newsletter or magazine. Share issues with others at church, in doctor's offices, schools, even hair salons.
- Take a walk at least once a week for the sole purpose of sharing time with the creation around you.
- Watch a sunrise and/or sunset. Sit quietly in the light of a full moon. Count the stars you can see on a clear night.
- Pledge to respect the unpredictable power of nature by seeking safety first when playing in and near water, when weather becomes violent or extreme, and when encountering creatures of the wilderness.

Become an Advocate

- Sponsor day-trips from your community to explore creation in all its glory: bird watching, lake swimming, boating, skiing, cave exploring, mountain climbing, trail hiking, river rafting, ocean play, and picnics in the park.
- Create a treasure hunt that will take families in search of the beauties of nature found in and around your community. Provide maps, directions and/or clues to locations, and explanations of the "treasures" they will find. Be sure to emphasize the need to maintain the beauty by leaving the "treasures" in place. Encourage families to take pictures of their journey to create a collage for others to see.
- Plan a "Circle of Life" service of awareness for a worship service at church. Emphasize the stories creation has to tell and the lessons nature has to teach.

