Habitat Observations

**Audience/Group Setting**
This activity is designed to be completed in a camp or classroom setting.

**Goal**
To increase participants’ appreciation and understanding of nature through observation.

**Objectives**
Through participation in this activity students will:
1. Practice observation skills
2. Practice journaling techniques

**Big Idea/Main Message**
Spending time outdoors observing nature is a good way to better understand the world in which we live. As people learn more about nature they will start to appreciate it more and increase their desire to have a positive environmental impact.

**Environmentally Responsible Behavior Addressed**
Read, write and learn about wildlife and nature.

**Background Information**
A plethora of research has been done in the recent past to confirm the importance of spending time outdoors on a child’s development. As our day to day lives focus more and more on indoor activities many of today’s children do not hear the term ‘go outside and play’ as much as children from generations past did. As a result, children may not have the opportunity to hone their observation skills in relation to nature. By providing guided experiences with nature observations environmental educators may be able to provide the tools necessary to enhance future (independent) nature experiences.

**Materials Needed**
2. Paper, pencils and clipboards for participants.

**Staff**
One staff person or volunteer will be needed facilitate the classroom activity. One or more staff members or volunteers will be needed to supervise the observation session depending on class size.
**Length of Activity**
Classroom session = 15-20 minutes  
Observation session = 20-30 minutes

**Set Up**
Very little set up is needed for this activity. The materials will need to be available in the classroom space; paper should be placed on clipboards, pencils sharpened, etc. The observation location will need to be determined before the activity starts. The only requirement of the observation location is that there is ample space for the participants to stand/sit comfortably.

**Procedures**
1. Open the activity with a brief discussion about observing nature.
2. Read the story *The Empty Lot*. Ask the participants to consider how Harry felt about the empty lot before he spent time there. Ask them to describe how his feelings changed after he spent time observing the space.
3. Explain that the group is going to spend some time observing nature. Tell the group the type of habitat which they will be observing within the Zoo (or on school grounds for formal educators): forest, wetland, prairie, desert, etc. Ask the participants to spend 2-3 minutes writing down their thoughts about that type of habitat before they leave the classroom. Their thoughts should include what they think the habitat looks like, smells like, what animals live there, what plants grow there, etc.
4. Once the group is at the observation location, have each participant find a spot from which they can quietly observe the habitat. Give the group 5 minutes to quietly observe their surroundings without writing anything.
5. The next five minutes should be a combination of observation and writing. Challenge the group to rewrite their thoughts about the habitat based on their observations.
6. The next portion of the activity can take place either at the observation location or within the classroom. Ask the participants if their thoughts and notes about the habitat changed after they had time to observe the habitat.
7. Lead a discussion about how spending time in nature can help people to appreciate it more. Discuss the benefits of spending time in nature versus spending time indoors.

**Extensions**
Cut apart and use paper grocery bags to make nature journals. This would replace the clipboards and paper. The reuse of a household material can lead into a discussion about how reducing, reusing, recycling and rethinking can have a positive affect on nature. More specifically, the group can discuss how recycling paper saves habitats.

**National Science Education Standards**
Science as Inquiry  
Nature of Science  
Evidence, Models and Explanation