Trail Guide for the Multisensory Nature Trail

Welcome to the Multisensory Nature Trail! This trail was designed with the object of encouraging children to engage with the natural world around them in a deep and meaningful way. Although the trail is geared towards children 4-5 years of age, it can still be enjoyed by anyone. To use the trail, simply follow the path and stop at each numbered post and read out loud the corresponding directions on this pamphlet. When you are done, head on back to the Vassar Barns and simply place this pamphlet back where you found it for the next visitor to use. Thank you and enjoy!

*To access the trail, proceed to the start of the Swain trail shown in blue on the the map of the preserve provided at the Vassar Environmental Coop Barns

1. Pond Stop:
Stop one on the trail is the pond! Can you think of any animals that live in or around ponds? I can think of some! Turtles, muskrats, herons, ducks, and frogs are just a few of the animals that call these ponds home. Close your eyes and listen closely, can you hear anything? Maybe you can hear the plop of a turtle rolling off a log or a frog jumping into the water. Can you hear the insects buzzing in the tall grasses beside you along the trail? In the winter the pond is sometimes covered in ice, can you still find signs of activity? Before you continue on to the next stop, take a moment to feel the warm sun on your back and head, there are no trees above you to cover the sun’s rays. Spend some time looking out over the pond, if you’re still and quiet enough you never know what things you might spot!

2. Red Maple Grove Stop:
Welcome to the forest! In the summer this spot is very shady and you may notice you feel much cooler in here than you did at the pond stop. In the fall the path is covered in fallen leaves, listen to them crunch as you step on them! Pay attention to the trees along the path, what do you notice about them? Some of the trees have smooth bark, some of them have bark that looks flakey or like scales. The smooth bark trees are called red maples, you may have already seen many
maple trees before! There is a special kind of maple that people really like, it is called the sugar maple. Can you think of something people use sugar maple trees for? I can think of one, I'll give you a hint, it tastes good poured over pancakes and waffles! The flaky-barked trees are called black cherry trees, but they're not the same as the cherries you normally eat. Reach your hand out to feel the difference between these two barks. You can also tell trees apart by the shape of their leaves; the red maples have leaves with three points on them and black cherry trees have leaves that look like pointy ovals. Now close your eyes and pay attention to what you can hear, maybe you can hear the wind or a squirrel running through leaves, but you can probably hear something else that sounds kind of like wind too. The rushing sound you hear is the sound of cars driving past the forest on Hooker Avenue, in fact, if you drove here then you travelled on that same road! The sound of the road helps remind us how people can sometimes change the way nature looks and sounds. When you're done listening, touching, and looking, continue on to the next stop.

3. Coverboard Stop:
Welcome to the coverboard stop! If you look down on the left side of the trail you will see some wood cookies (thin slices of wood) on the ground with handles on them, these are coverboards. Lots of living things like to live under things like wood and rock. Lift up one of the boards, what do you see? You might see what looks like white strings but is actually a type of mushroom. You might see a little pill bug or a fat earthworm or, if you're lucky, a slimy salamander! Feel the soil under the board, how does it feel? Does it feel warm or cool, wet or dry, bumpy or soft? Now lean in a take a sniff, how does it smell? Good or bad, wet or dry? Most of the time the soil will feel wet and it will smell wet also, most of the living things you find under the coverboard are called decomposers which means they recycle things by eating them. You will notice there is a mailbox next to the coverboards, open it up and you will find a notebook and a pen. You can mark down what you saw, smelled, and felt under the coverboards and read about what other people saw, smelled, and felt! When you are done exploring, continue on to the next stop.
4. Dead Tree Stop:
At this stop you will see a big dead tree on the side of the trail. You will notice a pair of drumsticks attached to the tree! You can use these to tap different parts of the tree and listen to the sound it makes, does tapping different parts of the tree make different sounds? Part of the tree still has bark attached, touch this part with your hands, how does it feel? Does it feel rough or smooth? Now touch the part of the tree where the bark fell off, what does this part feel like, rough or smooth? If you look closely you will see squiggly lines going up and down the part of the tree without any bark, these squiggly lines were made by beetles! Mama beetles lay their eggs under the bark of trees and when the eggs hatch the babies, called larvae, tunnel through the wood making these squiggles. When the tree dies and the bark falls off you can see the squiggles. Dead trees are important homes for many living things, mushrooms, insects, reptiles, and birds, are all examples of living things that may use dead a dead tree as a home or to find a snack. When you are ready, continue on to the next stop.

5. Field Stop:
You have just left the forest and you are now standing next to a big fenced in field! The area you are walking through is also a small field. In summer you may notice that this spot feels much warmer and brighter than the forest did, that is because there aren't any trees above you to give you shade and cool you down. In the summer this area might be very green or it might be brown and crunchy, depending on how much rain has fallen. You can hear lots of insects buzzing and chirping and you may be able to hear birds chirping also. In the winter this spot will be much quieter.

6. Stream Stop:
You just walked through the field and are now back in the forest! Welcome to the stream stop! Step onto the pebbles on the side of the stream, try jumping on them, stomping on them, skipping on them! Does it feel different to walk on the pebbles than on the leaves in the forest or the grass in the field? Now try closing
your eyes and listening, what do you hear? If you listen closely you can hear the sound of the water flowing past in the stream. The water in this stream comes from an underground pool made by nature, even in the hot summer there will be water flowing! Reach down and touch the water with your fingers, is it hot or cold? The water in this stream will always be cold because it comes up from underground. When you are ready, cross the bridge and continue on the trail.

7. Bench Stop:
This bench is a very special stop on this trail. On this bench you can sit and take a break and practice using your nose, ears, and skin to smell, listen, and feel the forest around you. Close your eyes and breathe in through your nose. In the summer you might smell green leaves and fresh cut grass from the farm, in the fall you might smell old brown leaves, in the winter you might smell snow, and in the spring you might smell the wet mud under your feet. Now listen closely with your ears, you might hear the sound of a bird chirping, a squirrel climbing a tree, the sound of a person walking along the trail, and many other things. Now stop and pay attention to your body, do you feel cold or warm, is it windy? Parents and chaperones: if your child is ready and willing, have them sit silently for one minute on this bench with their eyes closed, after the minute is up talk about what it was like for them to do that. Whether it was hard or easy and about the things they noticed. When you are finished resting on the bench, continue on to the next stop.

8. Mugwort Stop:
Right when you walk out of the woods and to the left of the rugby field is a big patch of mugwort. Mugwort plants have a strong smell that lots of people think smells good. Even in the winter, you can smell the plants. Try picking a few buds and crushing them between your fingers, this will help release the smell of the plant. Do you like the smell? People use mugwort for lots of different things. Some people use the plant when they are cooking to make their food taste better. In olden times people would use mugwort for medicine and as a way to keep
away pesky bugs like mosquitos. Bugs don't like the strong smell of mugwort. Continue on along the left side of the rugby field until you reach the corner of the fence to your left. This is the next stop.

9. Farm Stop:
At this stop on the trail you can see clearly across the road in front of you a big fenced in garden. This garden is a special kind of garden called a community garden. Many people do not have the space in their yard at home to plant a garden, so these people may come to grow at a community garden instead. Each part (also called a plot) of a community garden is tended by a different person, and people can grow whatever they want in their part. It is up to each gardener to take care of their plot, they must water their plants and pick the weeds. Many people don't mind that gardening is hard work because they get to eat all the fresh things they grow. If you want, after you finish the trail you can take a closer look at the garden! When you are ready, continue on to your left towards the bird houses, they are your next stop.

10. Birdhouse Stop:
Welcome to the last stop on the trail, the birdhouse stop! You will see two birdhouses on the lawn across from the parking lot. These are part of the preserve's Eastern Bluebird Project. Eastern bluebirds are little songbirds that are native to New York, that means that they come from here and belong here. These birds like to live in holes in trees near fields and open areas, but these places are becoming harder for them to find. To help the birds out, people are building bird houses for them to live in and raise their families. These birdhouses were built for the bluebirds. You may notice that there are two birdhouses right next to each other. There is a very important reason for having these two birdhouses right next to each other. There is another type of bird that likes to live in the same type of home as the bluebird, you have probably seen this bird around, it is called a European sparrow. Unlike the eastern bluebird, European sparrows are not from New York and they can take away important homes that
the bluebirds need. One thing about sparrows is that they do not like to live close to other sparrows, but they do not mind living near other types of birds. If a sparrow family moves into one of the birdhouses, another sparrow family will not move into the one right next door. This leaves the other birdhouse open for a bluebird family to move in! It is important for people to take care of nature as best as they can. This is just one way that people can help the living things around them! When you are ready, continue on back to the Barns at the Environmental Coop where you began your journey through the trail.

**Barns at the Environmental Coop:**

Here at the Environmental Coop we like to recycle! When you are done with your pamphlet please put it back in the box where you found it for someone else to use the next time they come. Come back to the trail as often as you like! Nature is always changing and so every trip you make to the trail you will discover something new.

If you have time, we would love for you to fill out a survey as well! Surveys can be found in the kiosk where the trail guides are kept.