

Using Your Senses to Explore

by Jamie Kelley, Naturalist, Pioneers Park Nature Center

I'm Jamie, the naturalist at Pioneers Park Nature Center. I'm passionate about the natural world and love sharing my passion with others. It's exciting for me to be at the Nature Center and to be a part of a place I have visited ever since I was young. I'm from Lincoln and have always enjoyed spending time outside, riding bikes along the many trails and hiking in the various parks throughout Lincoln. One reason I enjoy hiking and exploring is because no matter the season there is always something new to discover. I want to share with you some of my favorite tools I use for exploring here at Pioneers Park Nature Center.

My eyes for observing. I look high and low, near and far. What do I notice as travel along the trail? I might see tracks left behind by an animal, a nest up in a tree, or watch the tallgrass blow in the wind.

My ears for listening. Sometimes I stop at different areas along a path and stand still. What do I hear? The rustling of leaves, the buzzing of insects, the songs of birds. Or sometimes I just like to count how many different sounds I hear.

My nose for smelling. I not only stop to smell flowers in bloom but I stop to smell the leaves of a plant or tree and I even like to smell the soil or just inhale a nice deep breathe to smell the fresh air.

My hands are great tools for learning too. Is it smooth or bumpy, warm or cold, wet or dry? Sometimes how something feels surprise me. What looks soft might be prickly or what looks wet or slimy might be dry.

My sense of wonder. Yes, my curiosity is an important tool for exploring nature. I ask a lot of questions. Why does this plant grow like that? What animal made that track? As I hike I'll look for answers or at least clues that might help me make a good guess.

Many of my favorite tools are the tools I already have. I like to call these my five senses for exploring. But sometimes other tools can be helpful too. Here is a list of other items that you might think about bringing with you:

- Binoculars, these can help see things that are far way, up in trees, or flying in the sky.
- A magnifying glass can help see things that are very small or see more details that might not be noticed with only your eyes.
- A camera to document new discoveries.
- A pack with water and a small snack. This is important especially if it is hot out.
- A notebook or journal to draw or write down questions, thoughts, or make lists of things you see and hear.
- Field guides (books or smart phone apps) can be useful to help identify different plants or animals.
- Sunscreen, bug spray, a hat, sunglasses, rain or winter jacket, boots and gloves. Paying attention to the forecast and preparing for the right weather makes for a great experience while in the outdoors.

