

Unit Nine - Expert Projects: Writing to Learn and Teach About Science ***Animal Diversity or Weather and the Seasons***

May

Spring is the perfect time to conduct a unit of study on learning and writing all about things in nature. By May children will be itching to shed their winter coats and go on discovery walks. Our youngest writers are full of curiosity about the world. They notice the tiniest details around them – cracks in sidewalks, markings on leaves, and bugs – and they ask questions. They are big collectors and they conduct experiments, dissecting worms, setting up jars of things and watching how the contents change over time.

By now children will be excellent observers, they will have the language of poetry fresh in their minds and they will be eager to put on their scientist hats, as you ask them to become experts once again. As you design this unit, help children tap into their interests and their sense of independence. Even if you opt to do a common class study, it is essential that you provide choices and options for children to explore their own interests and follow-up with their own questions.

There are infinite possibilities for how this unit might go. You could choose one big topic for the whole class, such as “How Weather Happens” or “How Insects Adapt to Their Environments.” Or you might instead decide that each child will become an expert on a different insect, with some children studying crickets, while others study butterflies, or ants.

You’ll help children be expert scientists who identify characteristics or traits, conduct experiments, draw sketches, use their senses, make measurements and comparisons, grow and test theories, and so on.

In addition to the goals you may have for your children as scientists, you will also want to think about the goals you have for your children as writers. Children will again be returning to all-about books, but now is the time to bring new depth and sophistication to that writing. It is likely that you will expect that children write *many* all-about books about a topic or topics of interest across this month. They will continue to strengthen their skills as researchers, looking closely at their world, and now you can teach them to elaborate adding many more words on a page, and more chapters in their book. You could also teach them to focus a bit, so instead of writing *All About Insects*, they could write *All About Crickets* or *All About Insects that Make Noise*.

For ideas about non-narrative writing, you may want to refer to the All-About unit, described in detail earlier in this document as well as to “Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports” in *Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Heinemann, 2003).

