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# A Day as a Nature Explorer

## Materials Needed:

- A blanket or play mat for outdoor use
- A shallow tray or bin (like a baking sheet with a rim or a storage bin lid)
- A small amount of water
- Natural items: a few large, safe leaves; a smooth, large rock; a flower petal
- A lightweight scarf or ribbon
- Bubble solution and wand
- A favorite stuffed animal or toy
- A simple, age-appropriate picture book about weather or nature (e.g., "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" which shows sun and moon)

## Lesson Plan:

### Part 1: The Warm-Up - Getting Ready to Explore (5 minutes)

Begin inside by the window. Hold Oliver/Ollie/Mila and look outside together. Point out what you see and use simple, descriptive words.

**Say things like:** "Look at the big, bright sun!" "I see the leaves wiggling in the wind. Whoosh, whoosh!" "Let's go outside and feel the sunshine and the wind!" This builds anticipation and introduces the concepts you'll be exploring.

### Part 2: Exploration Stations (15-20 minutes)

Set up your blanket in a safe outdoor space (a backyard, a quiet park). The goal is free exploration, not a rigid schedule. Move between these "stations" based on your child's interest. Let them lead!

#### Station 1: Water Wonders

**Focus:** Sensory exploration of water and cause & effect (splashing).

1. Pour a thin layer of water into the shallow tray.
2. Place the natural items (leaf, rock, petal) in the water.
3. Sit with your child and let them pat the water. Guide their hand gently at first if they are hesitant.
4. Show them how to pick up a leaf from the water and watch the drips. Let them feel the wet, smooth rock.

**Language to Use:** "Feel the cool water." "Splash, splash, splash!" "Look, the leaf is floating!" "Drip, drop, drip."

#### Station 2: Wind Watchers

**Focus:** Observing the invisible force of wind.

1. Hold up the lightweight scarf and let the wind catch it. Let it brush against your child's face and hands so they can feel the movement.

2. Blow some bubbles! Watch them float and dance away on the breeze. This makes the wind's movement visible and magical.
3. Toss a large, dry leaf into the air and watch the wind carry it. Encourage your child to crawl or walk after it.

**Language to Use:** "Whoosh, the wind is blowing!" "Can you feel the wind on your cheek?" "Look, the bubble is flying away!" "Go, leaf, go!"

### **Station 3: Sunshine & Shadows**

**Focus:** Discovering light and shadows.

1. Sit in a sunny spot and point out your child's shadow on the ground. Wave your arm and show them how the shadow waves back.
2. Hold up the stuffed animal so it casts a shadow. Move the toy around and make the shadow "dance."
3. Let your child hold a large leaf or toy and see the shadow it creates. Play a game of peek-a-boo with the sun by moving a leaf to cover and uncover their hand.

**Language to Use:** "Look! That's your shadow!" "Hello, shadow!" "Where did the sun go? Peek-a-boo!"

### **Part 3: Cool-Down - Reflect & Relax (5-10 minutes)**

End your exploration time by sitting together on the blanket for a snack and a story. Read the nature-themed book, pointing to pictures of the sun or leaves that connect to what you just experienced. This helps solidify the new experiences in a calm, comforting way.

## **Learning Objectives:**

- **Sensory Development:** The child will use their sense of touch to explore the textures and temperatures of water, leaves, and air movement.
- **Cognitive Development:** The child will begin to understand cause and effect through actions like splashing water, dropping leaves in the wind, and blocking sunlight to make a shadow.
- **Gross & Fine Motor Skills:** The child will practice grasping objects (leaves, rocks), patting water (fine motor), and potentially crawling or walking to chase bubbles or leaves (gross motor).
- **Language Development:** The child will be exposed to new vocabulary related to nature (sun, wind, water, leaf, shadow).

## **Assessment (Observation Guide):**

This lesson is about exposure and joy, not performance. Watch for how Oliver/Ollie/Mila:

- **Engages:** Do they reach for the items? Do their eyes follow the bubbles?
- **Reacts:** Do they smile when they splash? Do they seem curious about their shadow? Do they show excitement when the wind blows the scarf?
- **Experiments:** Do they try patting the water harder or softer? Do they try to catch a bubble?
- **Communicates:** Do they babble, point, or look at you to share their experience?

*Any of these observations indicate successful engagement and learning.*

## Differentiation & Safety:

- **For Pre-Walkers:** All activities can be done from a seated position on the blanket. Bring the items directly to them.
- **For Advanced Movers:** Encourage more movement. Can they find their \*own\* leaf to bring to the water tray? Can they run to their shadow?
- **Safety First:** Never leave a child unattended with water, no matter how shallow. Ensure all natural items are large enough that they cannot be a choking hazard. This activity requires constant, direct supervision.

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