

Color Matching: How many colors are there in nature? 3? 4? Look closer and you will see thousands of shades of green, brown, hot pink, bright orange, purple and blue. When we only whiz past everything outside, we don't notice all this variety.



Before playing this game, stop by your local home supply store and grab a handful of paint color cards. These come in single colors, or sometimes in a strip with different shades of the same color on each card.

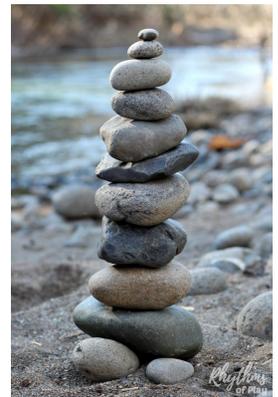
For younger children, just focus on having them find that particular color. A green plant to match the green card, some pink in a rock to match the pink card, orange lichen for the orange card. As they get older, up the challenge to have them match the exact shade of the color as closely as possible. Sure that pine needle is green, but is it the exact shade of blueish green on the card? No? Keep looking!

You will be amazed at the variety of colors you will find. Shades you didn't think were possible to find in nature. Get wild with it! Don't limit yourself to blue, green, and brown! Grab

a royal purple, maroon, magenta. Its out there.

Not only does this cultivate mindfulness, but with younger children you are practicing their colors.

Rock Stacking: Get yourself and your kiddos to a dry river bed, or other location with plenty of different sizes and shapes of rocks and then let them go wild trying to stack and balance them in different ways. The irregular shape of rocks makes this more challenging than stacking building blocks, and over time your child will develop an inexplicable inner sense of physics that allows them to do improbable things like balancing large rocks on top of smaller ones. (Side note: you are teaching physics!! Before you leave make sure to have your children dismantle the stacks. Leaving rocks stacked is a controversial practice that is considered destructive to the natural feel of a place and in opposition to Leave No Trace outdoor ethics. Leaving rock stacks in National Parks or Monuments is illegal. If your children are having a hard time embracing the ephemeral nature of rock art, let them take pictures before they pull it apart.



Make a Sound Map: Sit somewhere and be still and silent, notice the sounds around you and where the sound is coming from relative to your position. With the littlest children, just have them sit in your lap and listen together. After a minute or so of quiet, talk about the sounds you heard around you. With older children they can actually map out what they hear on paper. Have them make an X in the center of their paper. The X is them. Anytime they hear a sound, have them make a symbol on the paper in the place they hear it, to represent the sound. If the child is old enough to be working on map skills,

have them find north and orient themselves to face that way. They can add a compass rose and key to their map too. As they get better at it and more skilled with age, continue to add levels of complexity to their maps.