



Learning to relax and replenish is a vital life skill. And learning to observe can help anyone, at any age, to improve your ability to complete tasks well. It will also help you to enjoy life, since much of what we experience amounts to many small moments all in a row!

The ideas and activities here will remind both children and adults to calm down, to concentrate on something beautiful, and to focus - in simple ways, without schoolwork. Every activity offers a way to remember how to enjoy simple pleasures. Print the whole book, or just choose sections that interest you.

Rather than trying to resist the slow and simple side of the warmest season, let yourself be *encouraged* to slow down, observe tiny details and make the most of a Simple Summer!



WATER		
Laugh!		
Draw a Plant or Tree		
The Sky		
The Wind		
Pet Rock		
Decorate A Small Space		
Garden In A Box		

Simple Exercise

Clean Mind and Heart

 ${\sf Mini-Campfire}$

Tiny World

Travel At Home

Do Nothing On Purpose

Slow Down

Enjoy Your Food

Bird-watching

A Simple Poem



Make a 'pond' with a small tray of water. (Even a yogurt container lid will work.) Decorate the inside of it (and around it, if you like) with some stones or objects that you find pretty, and enjoy your own personal miniature 'pond', indoors or out. If you leave your pond in one place, nature will change it for you every day – a leaf may blow into it, a bird may drink from it. (If you keep it indoors, you may have to change the water from time to time to avoid a stagnant smell.)

Enjoy your 'pond' by sitting by it and watching the water. Does it ripple in the wind, or reflect your face, or the sky? Blow on the water or touch it gently with your finger. Make a paper leaf and set it to float about on the surface.

- Relish how cool and refreshing water is, even when you can't swim in it. Run a bath or take a shower, if you can, and take a bit of extra time just to play in it! Turn on the tap for a minute and notice how beautiful running water is. Splash, pour water from cups, squirt it at each other with your hands, and have fun!
- On a rainy day, watch the raindrops sneaking down your window, or landing on a small place that you can observe comfortably such as a bit of pavement or grass. Watch two raindrops and see which one makes it to the bottom of the window first. Look up and observe the millions of water droplets falling down towards you. Watch a small space, such as a part of the sidewalk, from the time the rain begins until the space is completely wet. Did it take longer than you thought it would?
- Use a clean spray bottle filled with water to squirt yourself or each other and enjoy a refreshing mist!

On the following page:

Try to make 50 observations about a body of water, either outside, or your own little home-made pond. Take your time to notice every little thing about it.

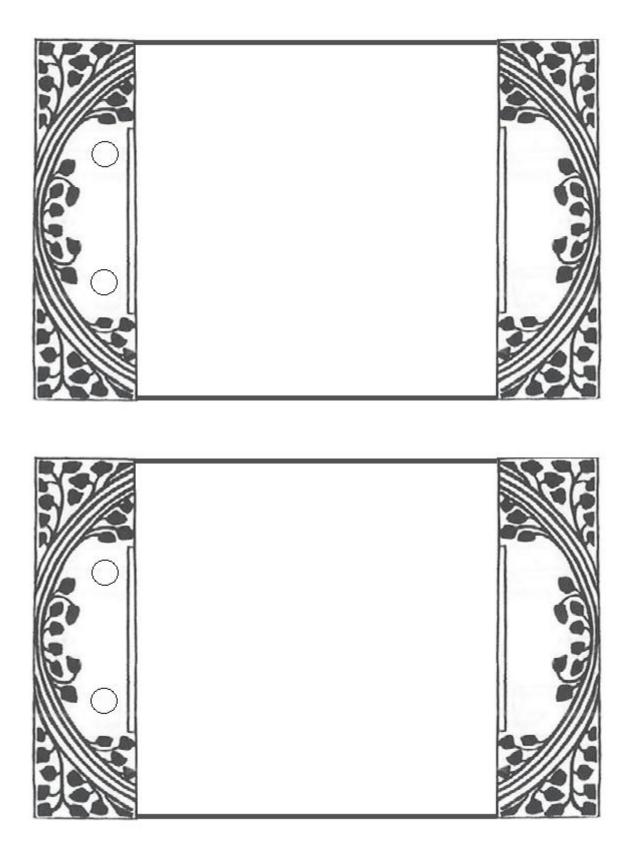
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WAT	TER



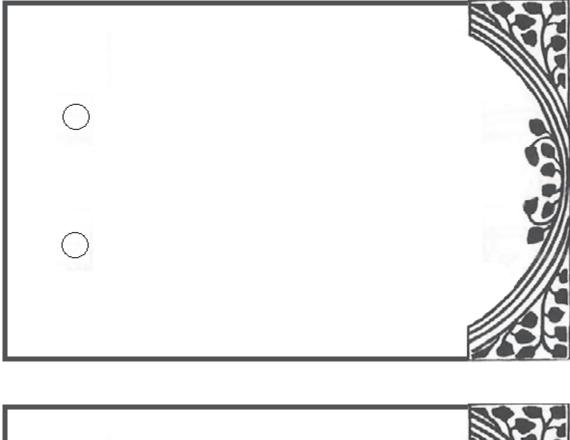
- Do something silly! Do something *completely* nonsensical! Make ridiculous faces or walk around with your head dangling between your knees. Say everything backwards or say the word 'stink' in between every word that you speak. Take turns saying 'what if' followed by the silliest thing you can think of. If it's not funny at first, just keep going until you *have* to laugh simply because it's not even funny! Who can come up with the craziest ideas of what to do (that won't hurt anyone)? Make silly noises. Flap your arms like a chicken. Wear your socks on your hands and try to tie your shoelaces.
- Try a silly game: sit two people across from one another. No one is allowed to speak, you are only allowed to make faces and strange sounds. The first person to laugh 'loses', and has to trade places with someone else! Are you all by yourself? Play the game on your own in the mirror!
- Make your own 'mad libs' by taking any paragraph from a book and copying it out, leaving blank spaces for some of the nouns, verbs and adjectives; then ask someone else to think of a word for each type of word, without showing them the text, and fill in the blanks for a goofy story. Example: My (noun) eats (noun). You ask for two nouns. The other person picks 'hat', and 'peanuts'. You'll end up reading aloud: My hat eats peanuts! Note: the more serious the text you begin with, the funnier the 'mad lib'!

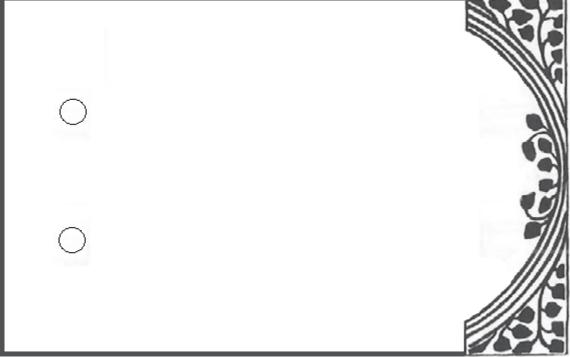
Write your own joke booklet, or collaborate with others to put one together. Find the humour in simple, daily situations, like tripping on something you could see clearly in front of you, spilling your juice, or making some same mistake *again*. Invent knock-knock jokes or short silly stories, or why did the chicken . . .

Use these cut-outs for a title page and back page for your joke booklet:



Use these cut-outs for your inside pages. Make holes where shown, and thread your book together with a piece of string.

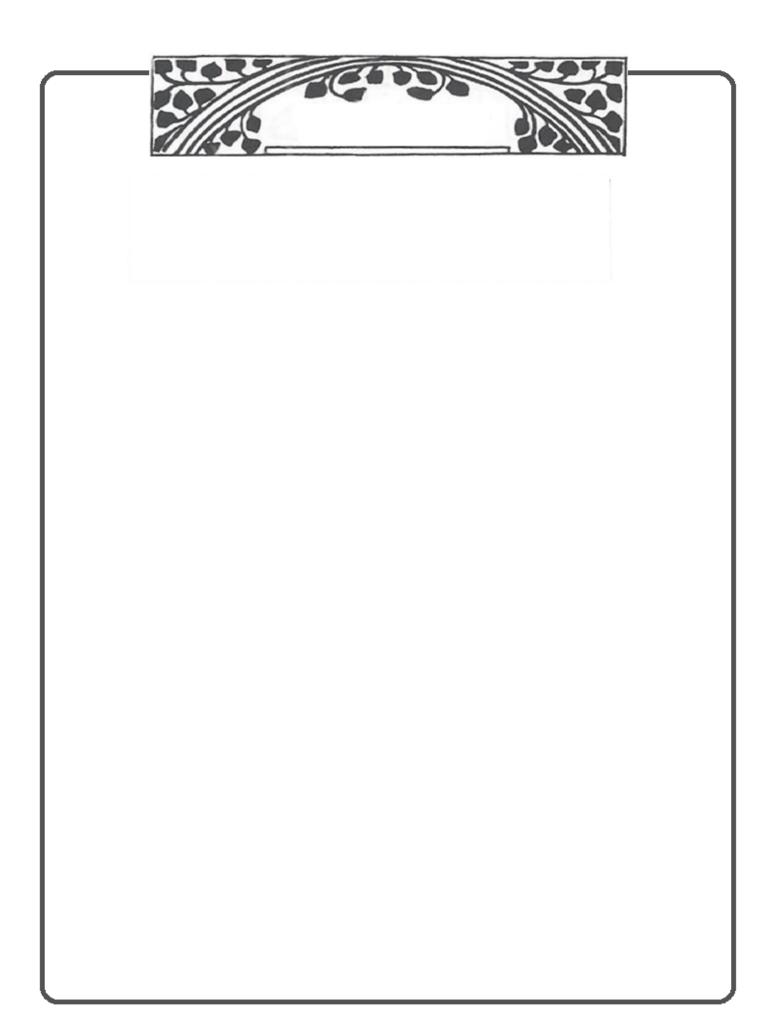


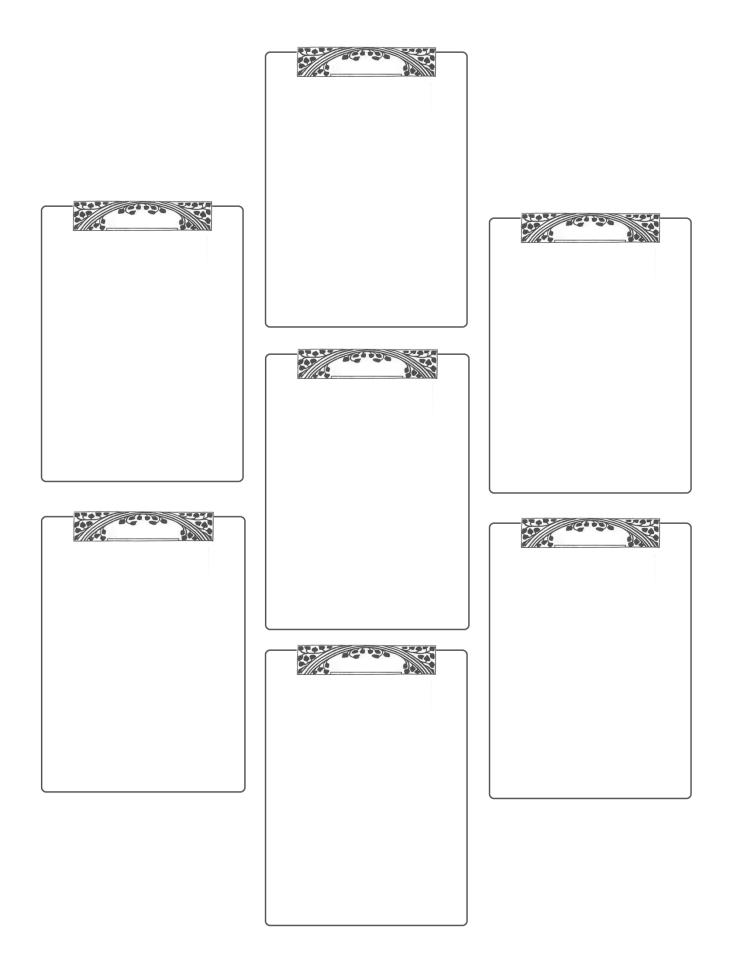




- Find a tree and 'make friends' with it. Why not give it a name? Observe it closely. Do bugs live on it? Birds? Is it young, old, big, small? What is its bark like? Are there others like it nearby or is it a lone tree of its kind? How does your tree seem to be when it is hot, or cold, or rainy? Does it seem to have 'moods', or does it always seem the same? Take time to watch your tree and get to know its branches, shape, and nicks.
- If you like writing poetry, write a haiku about a tree. Or, write a story about creatures or imaginary tiny people living in the tree. Imagine a whole arrangement of rooms and secret passages in the tree. Maybe the tree has a life of its own at night, and can talk to other trees and 'swim' through the dirt. Imagine you could live in a tree. Would you be a bird or squirrel, or a bug, or would you be a human with a treehouse?
- Is there no tree where you live? You can do these same activities with a friendly weed or bush. There must be one plant somewhere near to your home, no matter how small.

Draw a plant or tree, and take your time. Make one big drawing on the first page, putting a title at the top of the page. In the smaller squares, you may want to draw the same plant on several different occasions, and observe how it has changed over the summer. Or you may want to draw different plants and flowers that catch your eye on different days. Instead of thinking about what to do, act on a whim. Choose a plant you like for no apparent reason, and just draw. Draw a fallen branch or leaf, if you like.

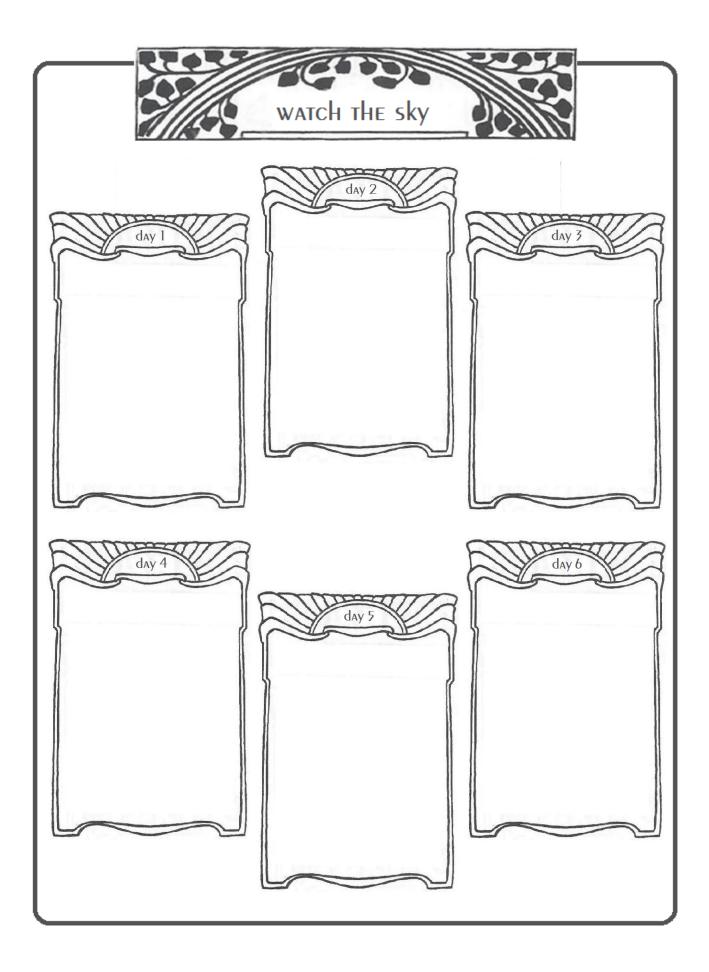






- Watch the sky during the day! Think of your ancestors, who had no TV: lie on your back and look up at the clouds, or watch the sky through a window of your home or a vehicle. You may be bored at first, but set your timer for 20 minutes and just gaze at the view. You might be amazed at how interesting a little puff of cloud can be when you calm your mind and simply admire the pure white and gleaming blue, and gently changing shape. If there are no clouds, or the sky is completely overcast, choose one small piece of sky to watch for your 20 minutes. Does it change or stay the same?
- Watch the sky at night! Try to identify which are stars (they twinkle) and which are planets (they shine steadily). Observe the moon without being scientific about it. For thousands of years, before we could write or take scientific measurements of objects in space, humans have been observing the stars, planets and moon. Imagine that you cannot read or write, and you know nothing about space. Look at the night sky as if you were seeing it for the first time.
- Look for shapes in the clouds. Watch as they change into new shapes. Imagine they are creatures or people and something is 'happening' up there. When airplanes were first invented, some people expected pilots to encounter creatures in the high sky, just as divers found creatures in the deep sea. What sorts of creatures would live up there? If you like writing, think up a story about what might live in the high sky.

Keep a little sky journal. Observe and take notes about the sky on 6 different occasions. Are you watching a daytime sky, rainy sky, night-time sky, a rainbow, puffy summer clouds, clear blue sky, murky gray sky?.You may wish to watch the sky at the same time for ten days, and see how it changes. Or, simply remember to look up whenever you can, and see what's new!





Who has seen the wind?

Neither I nor you;

But when the leaves hang trembling

The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?

NEITHER YOU NOR I;

But when the trees bow down their heads

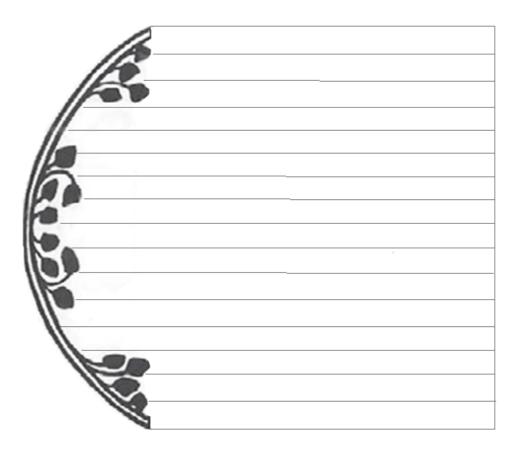
The wind is passing by.

('The Wind' by Christina Rossetti)

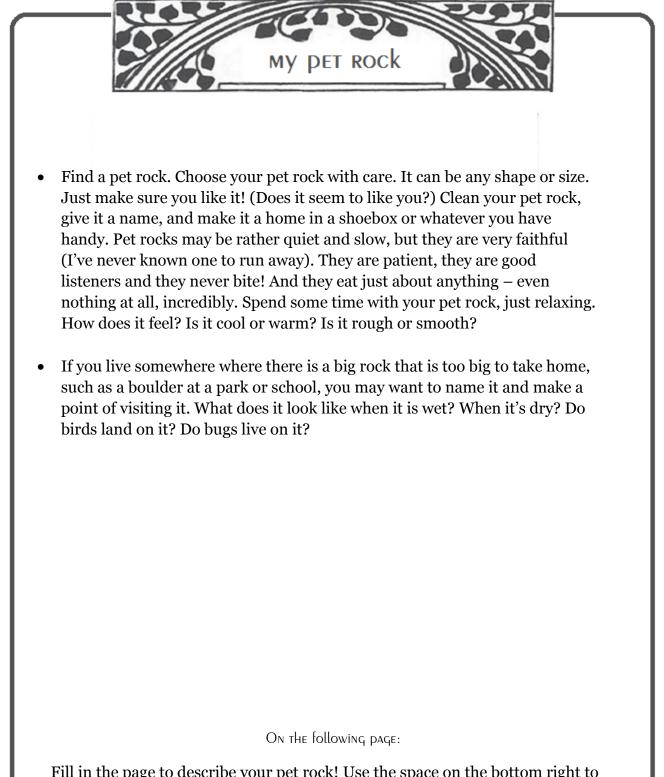
- Watch the wind. Through the trees, down the street, flapping a garbage bag or blowing a curtain. The wind is ever-changing and very moody, just like us!
- Breathe in and out deeply ten times in a row.
- Toss a leaf into the wind and see where it goes. Or, blow a leaf yourself. How long can you keep it in the air?
- Close your eyes and listen to the wind. Does it howl? Is something flapping or whistling in the wind? Can you hear it at all?
- Whistle! Just keep trying until you 'get' it by trial and error.

On the following page:

Follow the instructions to make a pretty fan and a simple paper airplane. Colour them if you want to! Cut out the shape, then fold along each line, in alternate directions, to make a fan. (Pinch bottom end together with your fingers.)



Cut out the shape, fold down the middle. Then fold sides down in the opposite direction to the first fold, and you have a paper airplane!



Fill in the page to describe your pet rock! Use the space on the bottom right to make a drawing of your pet. In the list, circle whatever you need to remember most.

	PET ROCK	
NAME:		
colour: size:		
where I found it:		
where I keep it:	11.0	
when I found it:		
MUST REMEMBER !		
bath talk food listen walk play change bedding		

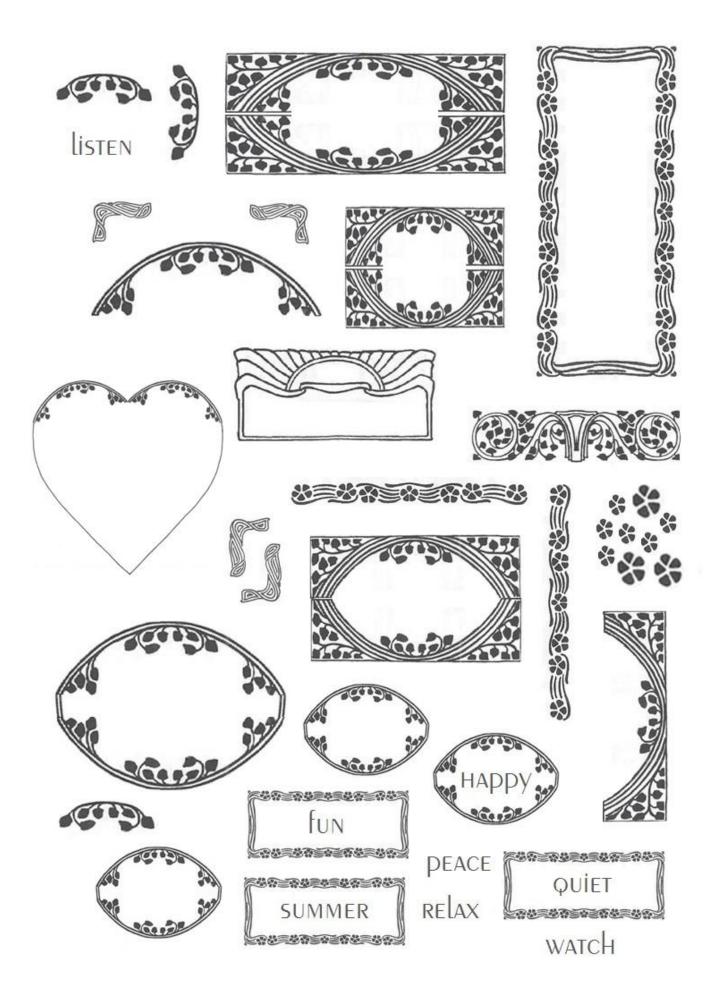


• It frequently happens that in summertime we feel 'trapped' if we have to be indoors or far from the idyllic countryside landscape of storybooks. In many countries where space in cities is often limited, some people have perfected the art of making the most of a small but special area. Rather than bemoaning a small space, make your own small space beautiful and enjoy it! Decorate a window or a little corner. Make it your own, using natural objects you have chosen, or small decorations you have made. Your space does not have to have any function. Its purpose is simply to be beautiful, and to suit your taste! This can be particularly helpful for families who are sharing small spaces and feeling that they are constantly invading one another's territory. If you take a small space, make it your own, and respect it, you can enjoy it.

What do you like? Cut out pictures you find, or draw your own, or make little models out of twigs and bits of things to decorate your small space. Make small paper cut-outs. Include natural objects if you can, such as a small rock, a leaf, or a twig. Observing a small rock can be as pleasant as observing a whole mountain. A single leaf can be as beautiful as an entire tree. With this in mind, decorate a window or a shelf with special, small objects. Spend time watching your special space and enjoy it.

On the following page:

Choose any images you may like from the following page, and use them to decorate a window or other small space such as a corner or even a binder cover or book. Colour them, cut them out in your own way, fold them . . . do whatever suits YOU with your own small, special space!





- Make a pretend garden in a box. Do not plant real plants as this can be quite tricky. Simply decorate your little garden 'plot' with twigs and whatever you want to make it *look* like a garden.
- Observe different plants that you see in your area, out the window of your car, or in your yard. Make up your own names for them. Notice which ones you like best and which ones you like least. What is the smallest plant you can find, and what is the biggest? Would either of them be suited to a garden?
- Make a rock garden. Japanese Zen gardens are made entirely of stones, and were meant to imitate ink paintings of real landscapes. You could make a garden out of something other than plants (using all the same object, such as only pencils, or only dried noodles). Some Japanese gardeners made tiny gardens to look like vast landscapes, if you looked at them from the right angle. Can you do the same?
- Enjoy the smell of a flower, and the flavour of a vegetable. These need not be from your own garden. Remember that the produce at your local grocery store is from someone's garden (or farm) somewhere! Enjoy it as much as if you had watered and cared for the plants yourself.

Imagine that the pencil line represents a pathway through a small landscape. Draw other things to make it into a garden, according to your taste. Will there be flowers? A little house? A swing-set? A pond? Vegetables? A bird-feeder? A statue? A bench? Are there animals? Some palace gardens in ancient times even included a zoo! Perhaps you would like to widen the path. Take your time as you draw, imagining every detail of how this garden would smell, sound, and feel.





- Who says you need equipment to get exercise? In fact, for thousands of years, humans have been benefitting from the best exercise there is: walking. That's right! Walking back and forth in your living room, up and down a hallway, or in circles at a rest stop on the highway count too! Of course, if you can find a pleasant place in nature to go for a walk, that could be especially nice. Take time to notice how you feel while you exercise.
- In the blazing heat, other calm forms of exercise are excellent for your health also. Plain old stretching brings the mind back into focus as we notice how we really feel, rather than pushing ahead through muscle strain to reach a ball or goalpost. Stretch gently however you are able to. Or, if you can, borrow a Yoga or Tai Chi video or book from the library and give it a try. If the whole routine is too hard, or the teacher is not likeable, simply memorize three movements and do them on your own without the video or book, whenever you can. Remember to notice what muscles may feel sore, and be gentle with your knees, back and shoulders!
- Here are 10 Simple Exercises you can do in your living room, to get moving. Getting some exercise can help you to notice how you really feel (Tired? Hungry?) and can help 'shake off the fleas'! Repeat each of these 10 times: jumping jacks, march on the spot, reach up above your head and then reach down and touch your toes, flap your arms like a bird, touch your right foot with your left hand and then your left foot with your right hand, hold your right thumb up and your left arm out to the side and spin, lift one knee and push both hands to the ceiling, sit and pull your knees to your chest (holding with your arms) and roll gently back to the floor and then back up to a sitting position, walk on all fours up and down the room, hop on one leg for as long as you can, lie on your back and pedal your legs as if you were riding a bicycle! Notice how exercise makes you feel, both during and afterwards.

Keep an exercise journal! Every time to you get exercise – remember that simple exercise counts! – write down the date and what you did, and put a big checkmark or a sticker to congratulate yourself!

today!	simple exercise
date:	TYPE OF EXERCISE:



- Sometimes the best way to change how you feel is simply to write down how you feel. When you just don't feel happy and nothing seems to cheer you up, take a few minutes to write down everything you don't like about summer. Once you've emptied your mental 'garbage bin', (that is, when you can't think of anything else to write) take a few more minutes to write down everything you *do* like about summer.
- Much as we'd all love to have a great friend for the summer, it doesn't always work out that way. Sometimes summer is a lonely time. If you feel blue, write a letter to a trusted stuffed animal or imaginary friend, telling them how you feel. You can keep your letter a secret.
- Sometimes in summer we spend more time with friends or family than we want to. Take some time alone to write out what is driving you nuts about a sibling, parent or friend, then rip up your page and throw it away without telling anyone what you wrote. When you throw it away, throw out all your pent-up feelings and breathe a sigh of relief. It's a bit like taking out the garbage. Of course, there is always new garbage, but the more often you take it out, the less it stinks!
- Is there something you are afraid of? Go ahead and write it down on a piece of paper. Take a breath. You may do the same exercise if there is something that makes you sad. Give your feelings the attention they need, because if you are sad, angry or afraid, nothing is fun anymore. But if you 'get it out' you will be able to enjoy even the simplest of summers!

Write down how you *really* feel. If you stuff away you feelings inside you, they will just pile up. Write down how you feel when you're having a bad day, and it will begin to improve right then and there. Write down how you feel on a good day, too, and relish your happy feelings! Did something nice just happen? Are you excited about something that *will* happen? Feelings are important!

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scared						sad
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- With an adult's help, light a candle and make a mini-fire pit with pebbles. Who says you can't have the fun of a campfire without a big blaze? You can learn all about fire safety and enjoy yourself with a single humble candle. Watch it together, or take time alone (if you are old enough to be careful). As with water and plants, observing a small quantity of fire can be very soothing.
- Light several candles all at once, if you want to change the effect. Place them somewhere you can sit comfortably to observe them, and where nothing is in danger of catching fire (no wind!). Enjoy the pleasure of a single dancing flame.
- It may be tempting to roast a marshmallow over your candle, but this will not work, as the flame includes toxic gases.

Try to write down 50 observations about a candle flame. Take your time to notice every little thing about it – the colour, movement, height, etc.

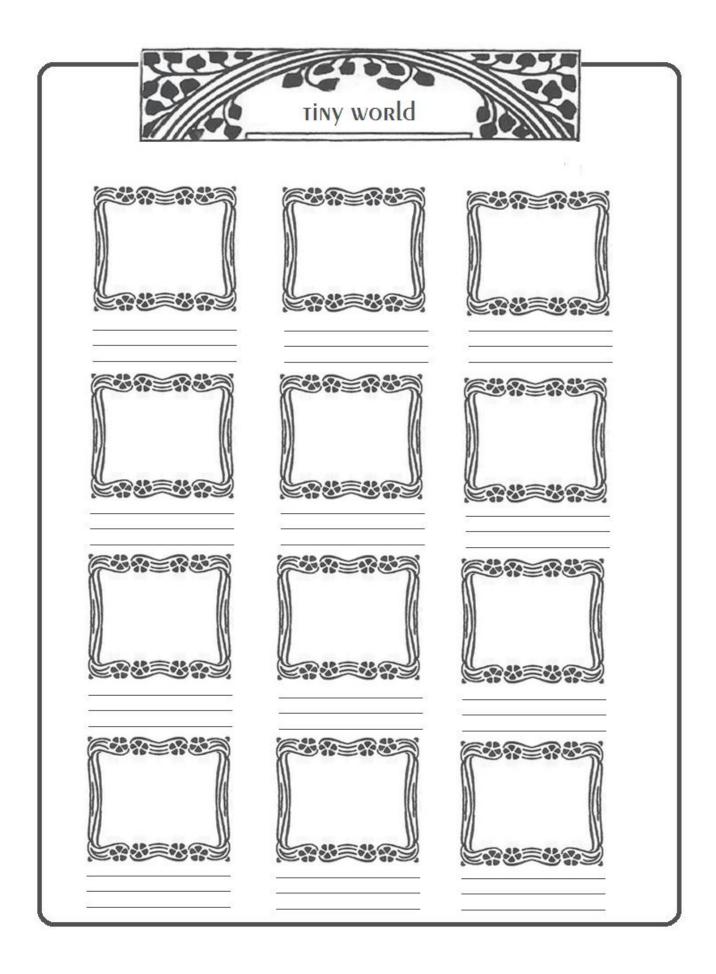
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• Take a piece of string, 2 to 3 feet (1 metre) long, and tie the ends together so that you have a loop. (You could also use a skipping rope or whatever you have on hand.) Take your string somewhere clean, outside if you can, and drop it on the ground. (If you are inside, you may wish to pile up small objects in a haphazard way and drop your string on top of these.) The string is the boundary now for your 'tiny world'. Within the loop, observe every little thing you can. Imagine that tiny people are living or playing in that space. What would they use each 'object' for? For example, a leaf may be a slide at a park for tiny people. A pebble may serve as a stool or table. Your imagination is the limit! Take your time to observe whatever is within the boundary of the string, and do not move your string once it has fallen into place.

On the following page:

In each square, draw one object in your tiny world (a leaf, rock, plant, bug, button, etc.) On the lines beneath, describe what the tiny 'people' will use it for. See if you can observe closely enough to fill the entire page with 'objects'! If you take your time, you will be able to spot many small things within a small space.

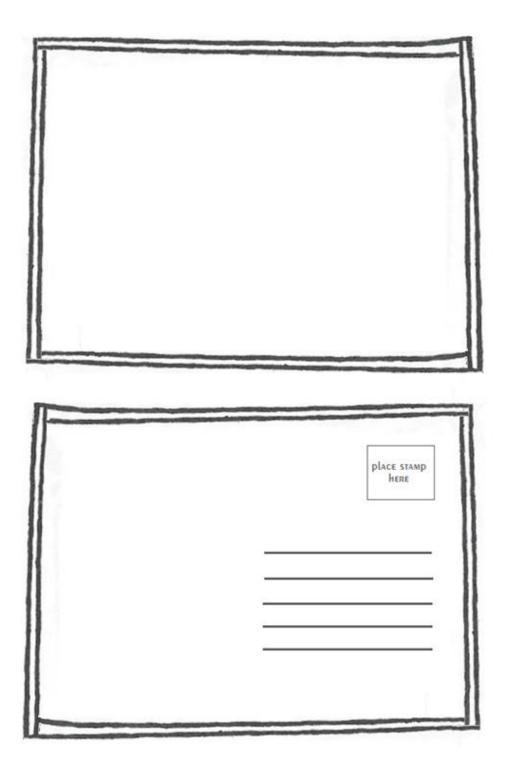


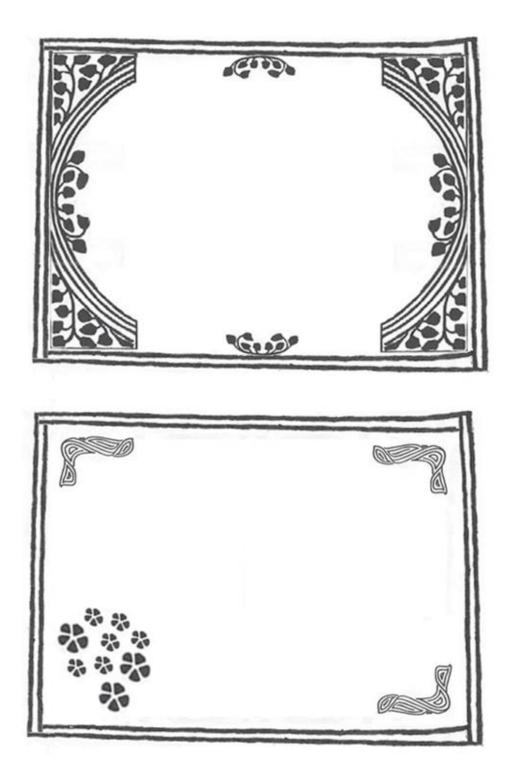


- Look around you as though you were a tourist, even if you are in a familiar place. What would strike you as most interesting if you had never before been where you are now? What would you look at, notice, and do in your own area if you were a tourist? What kind of 'hotel' would your house be? I'll bet the services are much better than you think!
- If you really are someplace new, take your time to observe what is around you, rather than letting it meld into one big whoosh of sensations. Notice small things, like smells and places where you sit, as well as the big things such as monuments and buildings.
- Write a letter to a real or imaginary person and describe what is remarkable about where you are. Pretend that you are on the best vacation you've ever had, and you want to tell them all about what you are really enjoying. Nothing is too small a detail food, weather, sounds, smells, etc.

Make a postcard saying 'wish you were here', where 'here' is wherever you are right now! You can write to yourself, for an interesting exercise, and try to convince yourself of why where you are right now is just great. Or, write to an imaginary or real friend who is far away. Do they live in the desert, or in a war-torn country? Sometimes the fun of being in a new place can be captured in the same OLD place, just by changing your point-of view.

Make your own drawing, add a picture, or write something on the 'front' side of one of these templates. Cut it out and glue the 'back' side (with space for the address) to it. (You may need to put it in an envelope if you are going to mail it.)

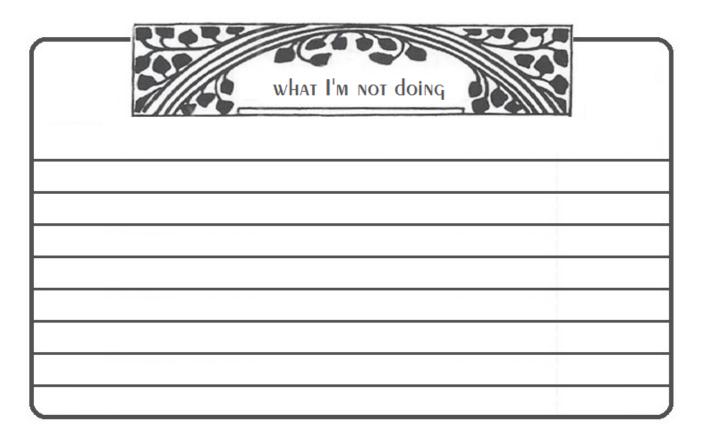


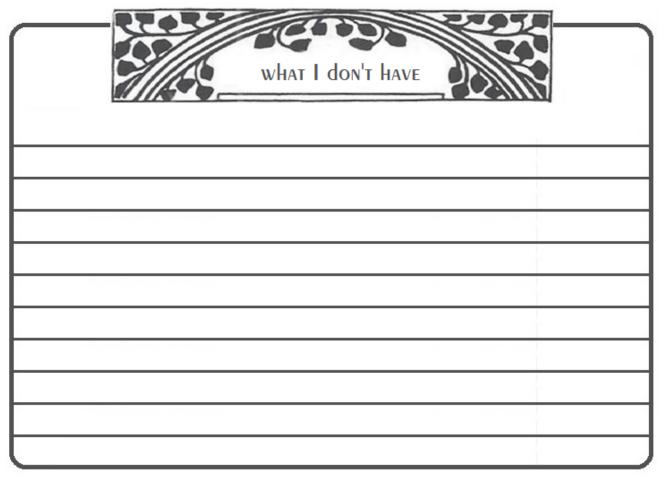


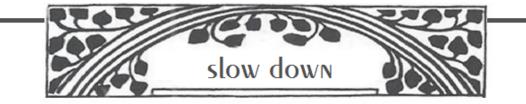


- In Chinese, there is an expression that means 'doing nothing on purpose'. Pick a day and *decide* to do nothing! It may be harder than you think. You may find it easier to choose a certain time in which to do nothing, rather than taking the entire day. For example, set your timer for 5 minutes, and sit somewhere doing nothing. Try to do nothing for longer and longer each time you do this exercise. (Make sure you don't try this on the day you're supposed to clean your mess or help out with something . . . !) Can you even do *nothing at all*? Does your mind wander? Do you feel any emotions? Do you find yourself watching something or reaching for a book without realizing what you are doing? Do you feel like falling asleep? Deliberately doing nothing can bring you rewards. It's a way for anyone to 'get back in their skin' and take a breath, and it can be very enjoyable once you get the hang of it. Italians even have an expression which specifically praises the 'sweetness of doing nothing'.
- Make a list of everything you are *not* going to do today. When it's time to write that famous 'what I did on my summer vacation' essay, imagine being able to say 'nothing' . . . with a sigh of contentment! Sometimes less is more just think of mosquito bites and food you don't like.

Make a list of all of the things you will not do this summer, or of all of the things you are not going to do today. You may find that you begin by writing things that you won't do, but that you wish you could do. Once you've run out of those ideas, try to look at it a different way. What are all of the things you will not be doing this summer, or today, that you actually would *not* want to do anyway? You would not want to spend six hours a day reading 'The History of the World' backwards, I'll bet. Or walk fifteen miles barefoot to get water for your family. Or eat only dill pickles for breakfast, lunch and dinner! Aha! You can see how this exercise might help you to appreciate what you *don't* have . . .

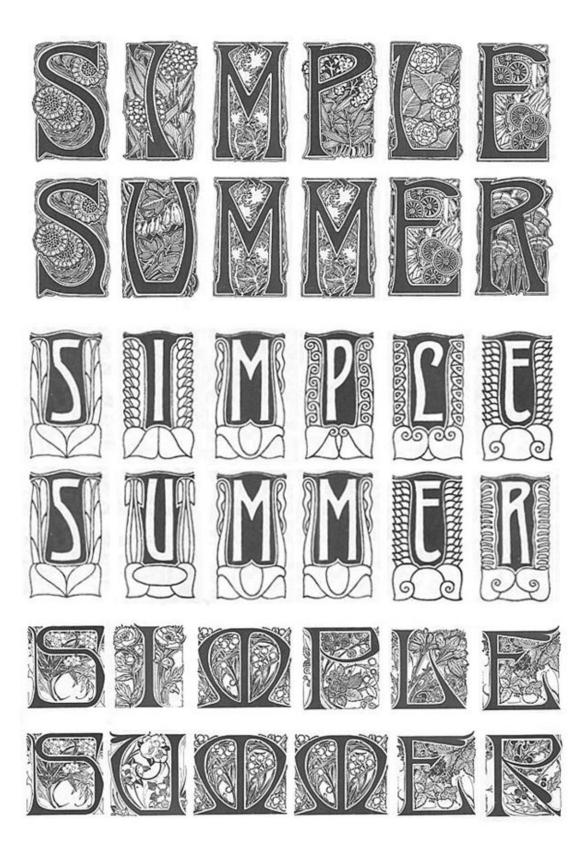






- 'Race' across a room (on foot or on all fours or backwards) as slowly as possible without stopping. Whoever gets there last 'wins'!
- Copy the lines on the palm of your hand onto a piece of paper by drawing them *without* looking at the paper as you go. Simply watch only your palm, and move your pencil. Take as long as possible. Time yourself. Draw something else in the same way.
- Do you usually gobble down your dessert? How about eating a treat and taking as *long* as possible to eat it (unless of course it's ice cream!) You may enjoy it more!
- Write your name as slowly as possible. Or, two people choose a word and both write it out at the same time . . . you guessed it! The slowest one 'wins'.
- Colour a drawing that is very intricate and includes many details. *Enjoy* how long it takes to colour every little bit. Or, draw something that seems way too difficult and complicated at first, but take your time and don't worry about how well it turns out. Just enjoy the process of doing the drawing.

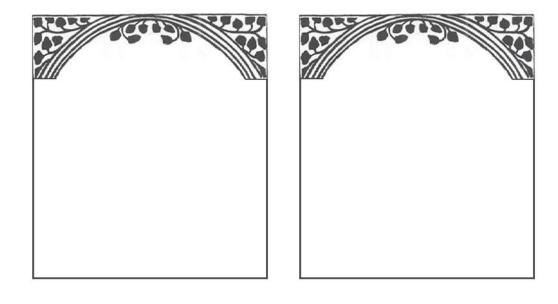
Colour in the decorations on the letters. These alphabets were drawn in the Art Nouveau style by artists who *took their time*. If you want to, cut out the finished 'simple summer' sign and put it somewhere to remind yourself to slow down and enjoy simple things. Or, cut out only one or two letters that stand for something you like. Just remember to colour them in *slowly*.

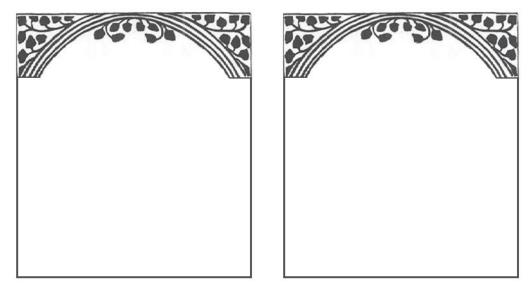


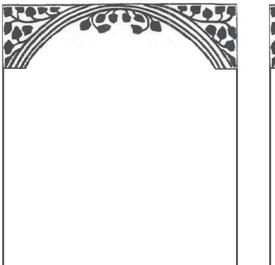


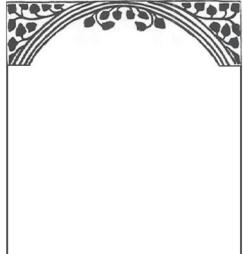
- Take a regular bit of food (a cracker, for example) and describe it as if it were something amazing! Take turns explaining why it is the most amazing, delicious thing you've ever eaten. See how many things you can think of mentioning about the cracker (or whatever it is), taking turns until you run out of ideas. Then try with another piece of food.
- Try something new to eat that is easy to prepare, using the same ingredients you always do. For example, try to think of new ways to eat a simple cracker and piece of cheese. What if you put the cheese under the cracker before you bite into it? What if you crumble the cheese into little bits on top of the cracker? What if you crumble the cracker? How many different ways can you think of eating the 'same old' food?
- Make up exotic names for the foods you usually eat. Spaghetti and tomato sauce may take on a new exotic flavour if you call it 'wonder noodle surprise' or 'worms in tomato guts' or 'angel hair in Titian vegetable purée'. Make up new names for the foods you like, *and* the ones you don't like!

Use these cards to write out your new snack ideas or recipe names. You may want to cut them out (maybe stick one on the fridge with a magnet, or put one on the table) to remind yourself of your new idea. Or, write a note on one, reminding yourself to enjoy your food, and put that one somewhere where you'll notice it!





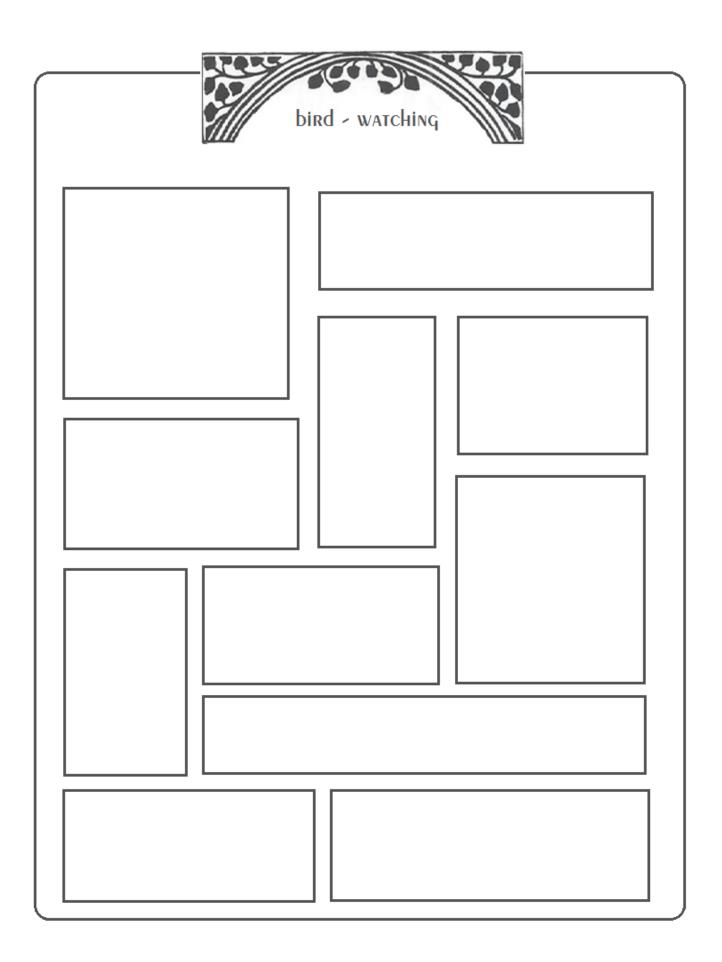


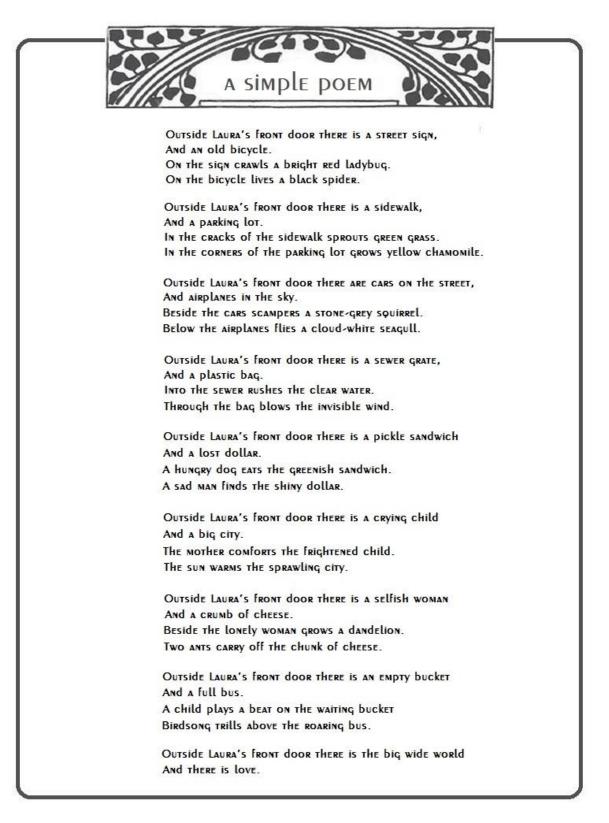




- Take an hour or two, and observe any birds that come in sight. Whether you are in the city or country, there is bound to be at least one bird that flies or hops by at some point. When you stop to think about it, it is rather remarkable that birds, of all the creatures on the planet, are the ones that we humans see most frequently in our surroundings.
- Make a point of noticing birds in your area every day. Do you see the same bird or type of bird every morning or evening? Perhaps you hear the same birdsong every day at the same time. Do you feed birds that come near to your dwelling? Sunflower seeds will attract quite a few different birds, if you sprinkle just a few in one small place.
- Look for birdie footprints! Yes, they will be tiny.
- What is the biggest bird living in your area? What is the smallest? No need to look in books, just observe for yourself and see what you can learn simply by being aware.

Use this page in any way you want to. For example, you may want to fill each square with a different bit of information about one bird you have been watching: one square for the name, one for a little drawing of it, one for a copy of its footprints, one for what you've seen it eat, one for when you tend to see it, one to describe its song, etc. Or, you may like to write a little something about a different bird in each square. You may have another idea – go ahead and do what you like!





Write your own simple poem about your own simple summer!

