

Kids' Favorite Things to do Outside

by Ron King, Natural Playgrounds Company

25 years ago, we started an assembly with a question to 600 kids in one school. They ranged in age from Kindergarten through 4th grade, and every student in every class participated.

We asked

On a spring, summer, fall, or winter weekend, with a friend or not, and with no homework or chores to do,

What is your favorite outside play activity?

I have learned since then to add the following: *Riding motorized machines, playing sports, playing with any electronic gadgets, and shopping at malls are not the kinds of outside activities we're talking about, so they are not allowed on this list!*

The following is what they told me; kindergarteners were every bit as vocal as the 4th graders! They came up with this list while sitting in their classrooms, so they were not prejudiced by their surroundings.

Read to the end for a short analysis.

So:

What is your favorite outside activity?

Being Quiet

Doing nothing/relaxing
Drawing (3)
Drawing nature
Drawing with chalk
Finding sticks/carving
Hammock/reading
Playing cards outside
Playing with dolls
Rest on a bench

Resting
Sewing
Sidewalk chalk
Sun bathing
Trading cards
Whittling

Building/inventing things

Build forts (6)
Building tree houses
Building something
Inventing
Carve wood-bow & arrows

Climbing

Climbing trees
Climbing mountains
Climbing anything
Climbing rocks
Climbing on net
Climb on rocks
Hanging upside down

Exploring/Discovering

Exploring
Exploring in woods
Finding sea shells
Looking for bugs
Looking for caterpillars
Looking for gypsy moths
Looking for painted turtles
Observing the neighborhood

General Games

Adventure games
Ball tag
Boogy board
Camouflage/hiding
Capture the flag
Capture the flag
Chalk games/hop scotch
Dodge ball

Fencing
Fly kites
Four squares
Freeze tag
Graveyard game
Hide and go seek
Hula hooping
Hunting for things
Jump roping
Kickball
Leap frog
Make up imaginary games
Play in clubhouse
Play school
Play tag
Playing games
Playing Star Wars
Playing Titanic
Pretend dog show
Pretend games
Red rover
Rock tag
Sidewalk chalk
Skip it
Slip and slide
Street hockey

Hiking/walking

Hiking
Walk the dog
Walk on a trail
Walking

Jumping

Jump in the leaves
Jump off of things
Jumping off rocks

Jump in woods
Jump rope
Jumping

Listening to music

Playing With Nature

Camping
Catch helicopters from trees
Find sticks
Jump in a pile of leaves
Mowing the lawn
Picking flowers
Play in woods
Play on the rocks
Playing in the woods
Playing in tree house
Relaxing in a park
Rolling down the hill
Search for things in woods
Singing outside
Study nature by river
Sunning

Playing in the earth

Archeological digs
Build sand castle
Dig holes/Look for money
Dig tunnels underground
Digging for gold
Digging in the dirt
Digging/playing in sand
Gardening Planting flowers
Picking raspberries

Playing with wildlife/animals

Catch frogs/tadpoles

Chasing squirrels
Play with the dog (Hide and Seek, catch)
Playing/fetching with cat
Watching wildlife

Playing Around Water

Clean out the stream Fishing
Getting wet
Ice fishing
Play in water/creek/lake Play on the bridge
Play with the hose
Playing in the mud
Playing in the sprinkler
Stepping on rocks in the river
Swimming

Playing in the winter

Building a snowman
Ice skating
Jumping into snow
Make snow angels
Playing in the snow
Shaking the trees so the snow falls Skiing
Sledding
Snow Tubing
Snowboarding
Throwing snowballs at something
Tubing (winter Sledding)

Playing with a ball

Bouncing dodge ball
Kick a soccer ball
Playing catch

Running

Chasing
Freeze tag
Play in field
Playing chase
Playing tag
Racing/contest
Run in the woods
Running/sprinting/jogging
Skipping
Tag

Socializing

Going to friend's house
Playing with friends

Play with sister
Sitting/talking
Talking with friends

Throwing

Throwing things
Throwing ball
Throwing snowballs
Throwing at target

Walking in the woods

Go in the woods
Hiking in the woods
Playing in woods
Walking on my path

I also give lots of presentations to teachers and parents, and I **don't** share with them what their kids said, but I ask the adults the very same question, with the very same exclusions:

When you were 8 or 10, what was your favorite outside play activity?

And the parents get all excited. They haven't thought about this for a very long time, so they really get into it, shouting out their favorite play activities, having great aha moments with each other.

And their list? **It looks exactly the same as the kids' list! And *neither one includes playground equipment!***

So I ask the parents: If playground equipment wasn't one of your favorite things when you were kids, and your kids don't like it either, why would you even consider buying it for them now?

The answer? It's easy. You have a budget, you pick things out of a catalog, and you're done.

So please, be more thoughtful.

Don't give your kids what you *think* they want.

Give them what they've told you *they* want — which is what you wanted when you were their age!