

Dear Family Member,

Welcome to our first unit of study, “Observing Nature.”

This year, our fourth grade students will build literacy and language skills by participating in ten cross-disciplinary units of study in our Benchmark Advance Program. Each three-week unit features a topic, ranging from economics to earth science, history and culture to themes in literature, and more. The units are designed to focus on two shorter selections during the first week, which will prepare students to explore the content more deeply in the second and third weeks as they read longer passages. As students read poems, stories, plays, and informational articles, they will strengthen reading and writing skills and strategies, participate in meaningful constructive conversations, and make connections to their other content area studies. We look forward to sharing your child’s progress with you!

As we start each unit, I will send home a letter like this one, introducing the unit focus and skills your child is learning. I will also suggest activities you and your child can do together at home to build on the work we’re doing in class.

In our first unit of study, “Observing Nature,” your child will learn how different writers respond to the natural world. For example, some writers use nature as the backdrop of their fiction stories, while others write essays or poems to raise awareness of the need for nature conservation. Your child will explore the many ways that writers capture the beauty and strength of our natural world. The selections in this unit feature a variety of genres, including an informational text, poetry, essays, and realistic fiction.

This unit is sure to inspire deeper interest in nature, which is the perfect topic to explore with you outside of the classroom.

I look forward to working together as partners this year. Should you have any questions about our reading program or about your child’s progress, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Observing Nature

In this unit, we'll read about how the natural world inspires people and think in depth about the question "How do we respond to nature?" Here are some activities designed to continue the conversation about nature and to build on the skills and concepts your child is learning in school. You might even ask the question for yourself: How do you respond to nature?

Topic Connection

Conservation Nation

During this unit, students learn that people's observations about nature have led them to understand that nature needs to be conserved for future generations and for the future of ecosystems. Help students gain personal experience with this idea. Take a walk around the neighborhood and choose something that demonstrates how plants and animals interact. What would happen if that plant or animal could no longer interact with nature in the way you just witnessed? Talk about the importance of nature conservation. Research conservation groups in your local community. Talk about how we can help protect the environment.

Vocabulary Connection

Animal Association Game

Your child is learning new words associated with nature and the behavior of living things, such as **crouched**, **interactions**, **occupy**, **perch**, **solitary**, and **territory**. Review the meaning of each word with your child. Then fold a sheet of paper into six columns and write the words as the headings of the columns. Brainstorm a list of animals that comes to mind when you say each word. For example, name animals that guard their *territory* or live a *solitary* life. Which exhibit social *interactions*, and which are often found *crouched* or sitting on a *perch*?

Comprehension Connection

Poem Swap

In this unit, your child will be reading a poem about nature. Show your child that anyone can write a poem to express feelings about a topic. Write a short poem about nature for each other and swap the poems. After you read each other's poems, illustrate them for each other. Encourage your child to be expressive and remind her or him that not all poems rhyme. The important part of writing a poem is thinking about the topic and expressing a certain idea or feeling about it.

Word Study Connections

Word Web

Focus on the word *interactions* and work with your child to analyze the many interactions that occur in nature. Make a word web with *interactions* in the center oval. Then draw five lines and smaller ovals extending out from the center oval. Work together to come up with five different ways that living things interact with each other. Write the interactions in the five ovals, such as "finding food," "communicating," or "caring for young."