ABSTRACT · Large print · 16 point

Wonder Together: Nature Stories and Empathy

The central idea

Imaginative stories can invite children to consider a viewpoint beyond their own. The deeper practice is learning to distinguish observation from imagination, ask rather than assume, listen to what another person communicates, and revise our understanding.

A nature-inspired story can invite children to imagine a viewpoint beyond their own. Giving a leaf or stone a voice is symbolic play, however, not evidence about what a living thing or person feels. Empathy becomes more useful when imagination is paired with curiosity, listening, and a willingness to revise an interpretation.

The brief distinguishes observation, imagined possibility, and established information. Adults can wonder aloud while making those differences clear. With real people, the next step is to ask and listen rather than assume. Children may show attention and care in different ways; a particular expression, performance, or emotional vocabulary is not the only evidence of concern.

Ideas for everyday practice

Begin with a safe object, image, or observation that interests the child. Invite a possible story without supplying all the characters or meanings. Let 'I don't know' make room for another question instead of rushing toward certainty.

Explore a character's possible need, challenge, or source of help. Keep several interpretations available and separate the invented story from facts about the natural world. An imagined feeling can be a starting point for inquiry, not a final answer.

Carry the habit of checking into real relationships. Reflect what someone communicates, ask whether you have understood, and change your response when new information appears. Considering another person's feelings can coexist with a firm boundary and protection from harm.

One small invitation

Try a Wonder Interview with an imagined nature character. Ask what it might notice or need, then identify which parts are imagined and which questions could be investigated. Offer storytelling, drawing, movement, or listening as equally welcome options.

Learn · Connect · Grow

Learn. What have we observed, and what have we imagined?

Connect. What could we ask instead of assuming another person's experience?

Grow. How has listening changed our understanding or response?

Care and safety

Use clean, intact, permitted materials suited to the child; exclude choking and other hazards. Never use a story to force disclosure, make a child responsible for an adult's feelings, or excuse harmful behavior. Participation and interpretations remain open.

These are possibilities for practice, not prescribed outcomes or guaranteed results. This abstract is educational and does not replace individualized professional advice. Seek appropriate emergency or crisis assistance when anyone may be in immediate danger.

Continue reading

Read the full brief and its research sources

© 2026 Resources for Caregivers. Free for personal, family, classroom, and nonprofit educational use. Share complete, unmodified copies with attribution, safety information, and source links intact. Do not sell, alter, repost as a separate download, translate, or incorporate into a commercial product without written permission.