



Duke Farms

Observing Nature from your Window

Created by Abigail Schmid with contributions by the Duke Farms Education Team

Have you counted the windows in your living space? Have you ever taken a few minutes to look out of each one and observe the outside world? Now is the perfect time to discover what is right outside your windows!

Bring a notebook and something to write with to each window and observe. Look through each one for 3-5 minutes. Be sure to use describing words and think about the following questions:

How are the views different?

Do you see more natural aspects or developed features?

Which window gives you the best view of wildlife?

Do you see anything you can identify?

Are you closer to the ground or did you have a higher viewpoint?

Which window did you like looking out of the most and why?

What colors do you see?

Try this again throughout different points of the day and notice how your surroundings change. You can even try doing this same activity but draw your observations this time.

You can make observations in many different ways. Below are views and observations from our Education Team!

Example 1: Observation in a list



- The grass is so green
- There aren't leaves on the trees yet, except the pine in the distance
- It is raining – I like the rain today because I feel mellow, so I don't mind being inside
- I like the way the sky looks today
- The bright green grass is a nice contrast to the gray day
- I saw a robin hopping in the yard
- The cherry tree in my yard and the tall tree in my neighbor's yard have very different shapes

Example 2: Observations over time



I have been looking out my living room window for 31 years. The view has changed quite a bit over time. The trees have grown tall and there used to be more shrubs in the understory, but no matter how many I plant, the deer always seem to eat them. At the present time, the main attraction in my field of view is a 60-foot leaning tower of Asian spruce. Hurricane Sandy ripped it partially out of the ground but the birch trees behind it caught it from falling to the ground and are still holding it up to this day.

As the hurricane-force winds blew, some of the spruce roots ripped out of the ground. The partially uplifted root mass created a hollowed-out den below the tree. This has been a haven for squirrels, wrens, juncos, cardinals, blue jays, and especially chipmunks. They love to take their cheeky treasures down into that hole where they can eat them in safety or hide them. They have a system of tunnels in that den that they have excavated over the years. I love to watch the chipmunks coming and going and chipping away.

Another huge pleasure when I gaze out the window is the beech tree in the foreground. I dug it out of the woods below the house and planted it outside my window 30 years ago. It was only 6 inches tall. I put a little fence around it and as it has grown, I made bigger fences to protect it from the pesky deer. Our biggest regret is that we didn't put up a fence around the whole property all those years ago, but the beech tree survives and makes me happy.

It still looks a lot like winter out the window, but spring is here. The cardinals are checking out the mock orange as a potential nest site, the spicebush is blooming, the chipmunks are busy, and every morning the chickadees sing their territorial "cheeseburger" from high up in the yellow birches. Yes, spring has sprung.

Example 3: Observations in a paragraph



When I look out the window, I notice the blanket of fog over the treetops, the small puddles of rain sitting on the roof, and the darkness of the trees; these things are all indicative of recent rainfall. I am satisfied with the current state of the weather because I know it is helping the forsythia bloom and it is necessary for other new growth. I feel cozy in my home because it seems like the outside might have a raw and chilly feeling in the air.

Example 4: Observations in a poem



How has the view changed from the window of my 200-year-old house?

Who before me has searched for signs of spring just as I am doing now?

My yard, sheltered from the river's wind by the old stone church, my fortified neighbor, has been on guard.

In the backdrop, a street, perhaps then a 1682 footpath, has felt the weight of horses, wagons, first cars, and even my kayaks on wheels to the creek.

Constant has been the sun, the wind, the rain and stars above as today's minutes turn the page to centuries of nature's reveal.

Example 5: Observations from the perspective of the sky



I have transformed from a clear blue to a calming pink. My friend, the sun, is moving on to light up a different part of the world's sky. She'll be back soon to warm us. She provides warmth and light for humans, and animals, and plants so they can make food for themselves.

Night is coming. Night provides us with a calming and rejuvenating period. It allows us to sleep and regain our energy. It also allows for nighttime creatures to emerge from their shelter to hunt for food and explore the land.

Example 6: Observations in a T-Chart



Woodlot	Parking Lot
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbor on the other side of the woods let their dog out • Heard a blue jay through the glass • Squirrel jumping through leaf litter • Heard some birds I did not recognize • Saw cars driving on the highway behind the woodlot • Saw gray trees, green cedar trees, red buds on a tree I didn't recognize • Saw 1 squirrel chasing another across a fallen log, up and around a tree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saw a grackle in the tree behind the building across the lot • Saw 2 crows in the trees • Saw 7 cars parked and covered in rain from last night • Saw 1 neighbor throw garbage in the dumpster, walk to his car – out of view • Saw all dark windows except 1 with a light on across the lot • Saw the rain against the puddles in the concrete • Saw smoke coming from the chimney of the other building

Lesson Plan Ideas

There are many ways to use this exercise for learners of all ages.

Young children can draw what they see out their windows at home, or at school. By placing a black construction “window frame” around their drawing allows for a customized window view.

As with the examples above, learners can answer the question, “What is outside your window” in various ways: paragraphs, lists, poems, and bulleted responses. To compare and contrast views, you may want participants to use a T Chart, or even a Venn diagram while focusing on the natural elements.

As an extension, ask the participants to draw the current scenery and then select a different season. Do they remember what the same view out the window looks like at another time of the year? Use the front and back of a paper plate or split the paper to organize these depicted views. How do the plants and animals they see change throughout the seasons? In some parts of the country, there are wider variations than in others. Ask your students where the widest and slightest variations would be and why?

For a fun family activity, ask different family members to “guess” how many windows are in your apartment or house. Write this number on a piece of paper and then go into each room and count them to check how close the initial responses were to the actual number.

Children’s Books: The following books can be used to enhance your lesson.

Outside Your Window: A First Book of Nature by Nicola Davies is known for its illustrations and describes a child’s relationship to nature in both city and rural settings. Through poems and poetic narrative, the book encourages children and their caregivers to go outside, to seek adventure and to discover nature.

Outside my Window by Linda Ashman shows children around the globe and how their views are different than one another. From palm trees to snow-capped mountains. snow capped mountains, it provides a perspective from different international locations. Listen to the book:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPzMaiUswZY>

Windows by Julia Denos follows a boy and his dog walking through town/city at dusk. It offers the “outside to inside” views of windows as he looks up at them through his eyes at street level. As he travels, he also meets various animals and people and ponders all the different window styles and those behind them. Listen to the book: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=815zINynBRO>

For more information about how you can create nature-based window lessons for your students no matter where they live, contact Kate Reilly, Manager of Education at kreilly@dukefarms.org.