

EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES FOR STAGE 2, THE EXPLORER IN THE GARDEN

Please read chapter 5 (on stage 2), starting on p. 111, before launching into these activities.

You can access printable versions of the activities following these activities

More-than-human Nature:

Time: 1 hour or more, Materials: None

Go out for a walk, adventuring onto the land. With each step you take, travel back in time to childhood. Remember how it felt in your body to be outside, as young as 5 or as old as 10. Let your center of balance shift downward. Allow yourself to walk like you did as this child, to see, hear, smell, think, and touch as you did, to *feel* as you did, to *imagine* as you did. Let go of your adult agenda. Make it an adventure. Look around, play in the sand or pine needles, collect 'treasures', draw with a piece of found charcoal, skip, talk to a tree, peer down a hole. Surrender to awe, fall in love every few minutes with something or some being that you encounter. Perhaps let yourself be that thing or being. Let it be a full body experience. Speak, sing, or make other sounds as you imagine that being would. Share with other beings (trees, a squirrel, a stream, or clouds your impressions of them. Be creative. Explore. Build things. Climb a tree, be still, or observe an ant with full wonder. Definitely spend some time skipping! Allow the world to be new again.

When you complete your walk, bring your 'treasures' back (physical or otherwise) and share them with someone — either a human or other-than-human someone. *This last part is especially important.*

Applying your experience to everyday life: For each of the next seven days, mark your calendar with a half-hour of playtime. During these interludes, hang out with the treasures you brought home from your nature activity, or go outside and explore new or favorite beings and places, or, if you should be so fortunate, go outside and play with a stage-2 child (an Explorer). Let him or her guide your shared activities.

Writing:

Time: 10 minutes or more, Materials: Journal or paper and pen

Based on what you learned in chapter 5 (on stage 2), use your imagination to let yourself fall into the body and experience of a *healthy* Explorer, age 6 or 7, from a soulcentric family. You might have a photo of yourself from that age that would help you get there. If you don't, that's OK. How does it feel in your body to be that age? What do you most want to do in this moment? What is most important to you? Let your non-dominant hand write down your strongest feelings. Let every word you write resonate throughout your body. Continue writing in this way for at least five minutes. Then you might want to switch to your dominant hand, but let your hand be moved by your heart, by your feelings. Write **BIG** and **EXCITED** when you feel that way. Write shaky and scared when that is your experience.

Applying your experience to everyday life: How was this for you? What did you learn about the experience of a healthy Explorer? What did you recognize about yourself and your stage-2 (Garden) qualities? What else might now want to find expression in your journal or on

your page? With a regularity that works for you, make a commitment to write about your way of experiencing the qualities of a healthy Garden.

How has today's experience of a healthy Explorer in the Garden been different from what you actually experienced in stage 2 (roughly ages 4 through 11)? Over several days, reflect in your journal about these differences.

Art:

Time: 15 minutes or more, Materials: large size paper, crayons or colored pencils, glue stick or tape

Look for a photo of yourself from around age 7 (or draw a self-portrait from that age, if you'd like; or find an image from a magazine that evokes your memory of self at this age). Take a large piece of paper. Glue or tape your photo or portrait there. Sink into the sorts of feelings that this child in front of you would be having on a good day. Let your non-dominant hand choose a color and then scribble or doodle your feelings onto the paper. What is your experience of life from this 7-year old perspective? What is important to you as a 7-year old? What attracts you? What is fascinating, alluring, interesting? Let yourself sink ever deeper into your feelings, imaginings, desires, and sensory experiences. There might be a mix of very different emotions, or perhaps there's a theme. Maybe you want to add words to your scribbles or stick-figure drawings. Do all of this with your non-dominant hand. Continue for at least ten minutes.

Applying your experience to everyday life: What stands out for you from this experience? How can you more fully live the enchantment of the natural world (pages 121 – 135) and deepen your learning about cultural ways (pages 135 - 144)? Place your "artwork" near your bed. Look at it and feel into it before falling asleep. Ask for a dream to be evoked by what you drew and experienced.

Art:

Time: 15 minutes or more, Materials: large size paper, finger paints

Dress in old clothes and cover up the wall or floor (whichever you'll use for your painting) with newspaper or some other protective material. Place a large piece of paper on the floor or wall. Let yourself sink into the time when you were 5 or 6. To help yourself get there, feel, look, listen, talk, sing, and/or skip like a 5-year-old. Close your eyes and let your heart choose the first finger-paint color. Using with your non-dominant hand, express your feelings and images with color in a symbolic way. Let yourself get into it. Let your hand love the colors and let that love move your fingers on the paper.

Applying your experience to everyday life: Hang up your painting in a place that feels right. Leave the finger paints near it. When so moved, continue your painting. Maybe you want to choose a consistent time of day to do this for the next few months. What kind of (subtle or big) changes do you notice in your daily life in regards to living the qualities of stage-2 (the Explorer)?

Deep Imagination:

Time: 15 – 30 minutes. Materials needed: None

Create a safe and comfortable environment for this activity. Allow yourself to breathe easily and quietly for a few minutes. Feel your body and your surroundings. Remember yourself as a young child (ages 6–10). Use your imagination to call up those feelings, sensations, and memories. Next, quietly, ask a guardian to show up in your imaginal world, someone who can guide and counsel the young child that you once were. Do not judge who or what shows up, and do not allow your mind to guide you. Stay with your quiet breathing and just observe. Notice that the guardian introduces himself to the young child and tells the child he has something hidden in his hand. At this point, allow your deep imagination and inner wisdom to guide what happens. When the imaginative part of this activity feels to be coming to a close, it's time to bring your present self back into the activity, first by being sure that the child feels safe and loved (by you). Then thank the guardian for coming. Invite him to return if you are comfortable with this. Gradually return your awareness to your breathing. Stay quiet and silent for a few moments, allowing the images to slowly integrate.

Applying your experience to everyday life: This activity takes advantage of the wisdom available when the ego stands aside. Consequently, it's best not to analyze what happened. Journal for a few minutes about your experience, your feelings, and what might feel incomplete. Continue this deep imagination activity several times over a couple of weeks. Allow a relationship to develop between the child and guardian. During your dayworld life, occasionally call on the guardian to help you experience your wonder more fully or to help you explore some alluring facet of your world.

Dreamwork:

Time: 5 – 60 minutes. Materials needed: None, though you may choose to use clay or paints.

If you have young children or animals in your dreams, spend some time with them in your imagination. Make a collage, draw or paint or sculpt them. Make a small totem and keep it in your pocket, or put it somewhere you'll see it regularly. Start a conversation with it — something simple, words are not even necessary. Your goal here is to simply allow the energy from the dream to remain alive and become your ally.

Applying your experience to everyday life: As in the above activity, it's best to allow these images to do their work in your psyche without interpretation. Keeping the image present as a totem, collage, or painting assists you in inviting that energy to join you as you go through your day. Over time you may notice subtle changes in your energy or feelings.

Questions to enjoy or ponder (to help you live more fully the qualities of a soulcentric Garden):

- Reflect back on your childhood.
- What was your life like then?
- What was hard for you? Easy?
- In what ways were you encouraged or blocked in being a healthy Explorer in a wholesome Garden?
- What is clearly alive in you now from a soulcentric Garden? What not?

Applying your experience to everyday life: What additional Explorer qualities would serve you now in your daily life? *In what ways* would they serve you? Choose one Explorer quality and make a commitment to live it more fully every day for the next two weeks.

Practices for Re-awakening Wonder after the Garden (in the Oasis or later)

See *Nature and the Human Soul* for descriptions of the following activities

Play and wonder in wild places (see NATHS, p. 162)

Cultivating your deep imagination

Other suggestions

Play and wonder in wild places

Spend as much time as you can — either alone or with a prepubertal child — in wild or semiwild places. A city park, woodlot, or garden will do. If and when you can, get out of the city and into less tame places. Make a regular habit of it. Learn the names of plants and animals, if you'd like, but more important, learn through your own senses their habits, stages or cycles of growth, habitats, and needs. Don't forget about the water-dwelling and airroaming creatures, in addition to those that favor land. Also, through your own observations, what can you learn about rocks, about their geological origins, about their textures, and hardness? For the time being, don't consult books. Do filter out your ideas about these others' "usefulness" or "nonusefulness" to humans. Get to know them on their own turf, instead. Observe them and respectfully interact with them with as much reverence and wonder as you can muster.

If you bring along a child, then once you arrive at your destination, let her bring you along. Let her set the pace and the focus. Get down to her level. It's your responsibility to keep the two of you safe enough, but other than that, let her be your role model, your guide to wonder and exploration.

Like a child, allow yourself to become a naturalist, something you'll find easy if you let yourself be curious. All humans are naturally naturalists. We humans evolved, after all, in the wild, and our survival and fulfillment depended on our having the ability and desire to get to know our world fully and subtly. Genetically, you are still one of those humans.

Visit field, forest, wetland, desert, and ocean as often as you can. Offer your attention with care. If you like, keep a journal of what you discover.

Cultivating your deep imagination

If you don't enjoy a robust relationship with the imaginal, especially your deep imagination — your dreams, deep imagery, and visionary capacities — consider taking courses in dreamwork, imagery journeys, art, dance, music, or creative writing.

Other suggestions

- Allow yourself to play again! Play the way an Explorer does. Skip. Build sandcastles.
- Play fort or tag. Learn to skateboard or ride a mountain bike.
- Immerse yourself in one or more expressive arts, playfully.
- Try new forms of movement or dance, including Authentic Movement or five rhythms. "Authentic Movement is a completely self-directed form in which individuals may discover a movement pathway that offers a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious." See Authentic Movement Institute, www.authenticmovement-usa.com. Five rhythms is a

movement meditation practice devised by Gabrielle Roth in the 1960s. See Gabrielle Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 1997).

- Become a gardener with an emphasis on wonder and play.
- Read a book on the Universe Story and let yourself feel the astounding and bewildering imagination of the cosmos. (I know of no better resource in this regard than Brian Swimme's *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996). On a clear night, go to a place far from city lights (ideally with an Explorer), lay on the ground, gaze deeply into the sky, and wonder. Perhaps learn to use a telescope.
- Watch for synchronicities in this playful universe!
- Learn a new language, just for fun.
- Lose yourself in poetry.
- Do something that is totally new to you (eat new food, travel, visit museums, dance).
- Go to a children's museum or an amusement park.