

Words in the World! (STEM principle: Technology)

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Learning to read is one of the first important milestones on the way to becoming independent. The best way to learn is to practice, practice, practice! Even out in nature, it is easy to brush up on your pre-reading (or reading) skills. If you look hard enough, you can find words and letters just about anywhere.

The next time you and your kids are out on a family-friendly hike, keep your eyes open. If you look for long enough, a few of the shapes you see might resemble some of the letters of the alphabet. Look for crooked roots poking out of the ground (a Z?), or some branches that look just like the letter Y. When you find a letter, encourage your child to write it down, or better yet, take a picture of the letters. Try to see what words you can make together!

If you run out of letters in trees and their roots, there are lots of other creative choices. For example, you can use rocks and sticks to make the straight parts of letters like “L,” “W,” and “T.” Kids also enjoy carving letters into mud with their hiking sticks. Curvy letters like “O” and “S” can be made out of rocks, pine cones and bark. During a snack break you can use bits of trail mix. Pretzels are easy for little ones to shape into letters after a few bites. The trail you're on probably has a sign nearby, providing a nice opportunity for a little “I SPY!”

After you've found a good number of letters, ask the kids if they found enough to spell out their whole names. If you brought a camera with you, try taking pictures of the letters all together. If you can't, take lots of pictures to stitch together. When you get home, you can put the pictures together to spell out their name, perfect for putting up on the bedroom wall or the fridge!

Another cool game you can play once you've found some letters is to see what words start with the letters you find. If you found the letter “T,” you could look together for the first thing that starts with a T nearby, like a TRUNK or a TRAIL sign. Start by saying the sound the letter makes. Sound it out together, and see how many things around you also start with that sound. You'll be reading like champions in no time!