

Curiosity is the starting point of learning. Curiosity is an eagerness for knowledge.

For children, curiosity provides the incentive to investigate the world. And investigate they must. They need to discover who can be trusted, what is dangerous and what is fun. Children need to establish boundaries. This early learning is intense and full of action. Curiosity will, for example, lead them to the shore of a lake. They will touch the water, splash it, drink it, squeeze it, pour it. They will learn about the water through this activity. They will acquire vast amounts of information in short periods of time.

An adult's enthusiasm for learning can be as intense as a child's. Maturity is not the end of awe and wonder. Intense, curiosity-inspired learning can be sustained throughout life. Northern Minnesota explorer and naturalist Sigurd Olson wrote:

While we are born with curiosity and wonder . . . such inherent joys are often lost. I also know that, being deep within us, their latent glow can be fanned to flame again by awareness and an open mind.

To fan the flame of curiosity, be spontaneous. Follow instincts and interests. The activities in this section of the book are designed to capitalize on our curiosity and let it lead to fun and learning.

Curiosity is the invitation to explore. If you follow the curiosity of the child within you, the glow of wonder will be fanned to flame.



# CURIOSITY



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# 1. Serentripty

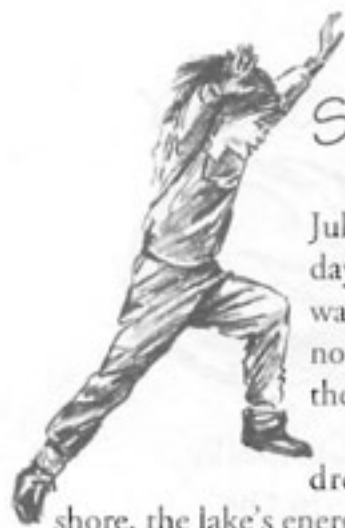
Children are remarkably competent human beings. Sure, they spill juice, track mud across the kitchen, fuss over mosquito bites and pick fights with their brothers and sisters—but so do adults.

If given the chance, little people can also paddle canoes, discover intricate spider webs, wash camp dishes and create sensitive poems and pictures. Children can be strong partners—even leaders—in the outdoors.

If you respect the leadership of children you will accomplish amazing feats—feats like boulder jumping and agate finding and ant studying.

The success of this activity depends on your ability to become one in spirit with the children. During a Serentripty outing it is more important to be in tune with the children's feelings than to adhere to a prescribed lesson plan.





## Serentripity: The Story

July 14. It was a cold summer day at Lake Superior. Frigid waves, driven by a powerful northeast wind, spilled over the shore.

But to those who were dressed to play along its shore, the lake's energy was contagious.

"I want to be leader first, Dad," said eight-year-old Galen.

"OK, go for it," said Paul.

Galen led Ben, Brian and Ramona out of the "fort"—a huge crevice formed in the granite by an eternity of thawing and freezing along the lakeshore.

Paul helped the three-year-olds up an alternate route. Once on the "roof" of their gigantic fort, Galen lay belly down to peer into a rain-water pool. "Come on, Dad, hurry up," he commanded. Paul hustled the three-year-olds over another crevice.

Sally promptly sat on a rock with a determined look on her face. And young Carolyn just held on tighter than ever to Paul's hand.

Galen and the older kids sped off to search for agates down on the pebble beach. Galen yelled, "Dad, look at this neat agate I found!"

Meanwhile, Eva had joined Sally in permanent residence on the rock. The game's fate was clearly sealed.

"Galen, you go ahead and keep being leader! I've got to stay here with the girls." Paul shouted above the roar of the waves. "They just can't

keep up with you."

Paul turned around to find the little girls peering between two boulders.

"Look what Sally found!" yelled Eva. Paul lay down and joined them in admiring a spider's web that imprisoned a dozen bugs. The four-some speculated on where the spider was, how the bugs had gotten stuck, why the web was hidden down in the boulders.

Sally gained courage and scampered off toward the lake, but in the opposite direction from the older kids who were still searching for beautiful agates. She skillfully pulled her slender 37 inches to the top of a boulder twice that high and stood silhouetted against the thundering gray-green waves. "LAKE SUPERIOR!" she screamed at the top of her lungs.

Carolyn and Eva wandered over and demanded access to Sally's perch. Then all three of them joined in raucous chorus, "LAAAkke SUUPPEERIOOORRR!"

A gull flew past and landed nearby. One by one the girls slid down and moved toward the wary bird. It wisely took flight when the trio got within 10 yards. As quickly as the wind carried the gull out over the waves, the girls' attention shifted to the "fort" they had earlier discovered with the older kids.

Paul pretended not to be watching. He climbed atop the "yelling boulder" to check on the safety of the older kids. By the time he was down again, the girls were out of sight.

"I am a hungry whale looking for something

to eat!" he roared. Giggles came from the crevice below him. Carefully hopping to a lower rock, he repeated his call. This time the gigglers gave themselves away.

"How did you get in there?" asked the whale. More giggles came from the girls as the whale scrunched himself up to fit into the crevice.

"Dad, we want to play hide-and-seek," came a voice from above.

Ramona, Ben, Brian and Galen clambered down to peek into the hiding place. The little girls proudly showed it off and let each of the

older kids take a turn inside.

"Who wants to play hide-and-seek?" asked Paul.

A resounding "Me!" followed.

"The little girls and I will be it. We'll count to 25—one, two, three, four. . . ." Four pairs of legs danced up the rocks and disappeared onto the outcropping above. Eva, Carolyn and Sally lay their heads on Paul's lap and counted with him. Protected from the fury of wind and waves above them, the foursome gathered energy for the new adventure.

## Activity

*Purpose* To playfully foster a child's curiosity.

*Age/Number/Setting* Some activities are best if spontaneous. Anyone of any age can play Serentripity.

*Materials* None

*How-To* Let a special child in your life be your leader. When a child shows curiosity about some natural object, drop everything and join in the investigation.

For example, if the child begins to follow an ant, join the excursion, offering encouraging questions like: "Where do you think he is going?" "Does he live in a house like ours?"

Similarly, follow an adult who shows curiosity. The challenge is greater here. Whereas a child will almost automatically follow his

curiosity, an adult will most likely have to be coaxed into following through on an initial expression of curiosity. Suppose a friend expresses awe and wonder at the color and form of a newly emerging mushroom. Rather than being content to mutter the usual, "That is really neat!" affirmation, get down on all fours. Look underneath the cap and talk about it: "Look, it's a different color underneath. I wonder how many there are around here?"

When do you stop encouraging the curiosity of your child, spouse or friend and move on to something new? Only you can decide.

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Sigurd Olson



## Did You Know? Parents Were Important to Famous Naturalists

Many well-known naturalists attribute the longevity of their curiosity to the presence of a playful, encouraging adult in their childhood. Minnesota naturalist Sigurd Olson recalled his first sense of wonder experience in his book, *Singing Wilderness*:

My first recollection came one sunny afternoon when Mother led me through a grove of maples in the fall. That day the trees must have been in full color, for the ground was deep in drifting leaves. As we walked through them we were surrounded with color, and when the wind blew we were drenched with it. The whirling masses of red and yellow filled me with excitement, and when we ran through the grove we ran and ran until we could run no more and sank laughing to the ground—color and beauty became part of my life.