

Gratitude Cairns

When you start thinking of things you are grateful for, you cannot stop!



Age: All

Time: 30 minutes

Cairns are stacks of stones or rocks that have some meaning for the people who create them. This game involves stacking and naming things you are thankful for.

Here's How:

1. As you walk through the Children's Discovery Forest, **look for five rocks or stones you can stack.** You can dig for rocks and stones in the Childrens' Discovery Forest: they will not be too deep.

2. **Look around you and think about things that you are grateful for.** Each rock will represent something.

- One rock could represent trees. We can be grateful for trees because they clean the air and provide oxygen for us to breathe.
- Another rock could represent the sun. We can be thankful for sunshine because it helps us see and feel warm. Plants use sunlight to make food, and then we eat the plants for our food.

- Another rock could represent rain. We can be grateful for rain because we and the plants and animals around us need water to live and grow.

3. Name two more things in this environment you are grateful for. Did you think of rivers? lakes? blossoms? berries? grass? moon? stars? So many ideas!

4. Stack your rocks to make a gratitude cairn. Experiment to find ways to keep your rocks and stones stacked without falling.

- Build another cairn if you think of more things you are grateful for.

5. Take a photo or sketch your cairn.

- Write down what each rock represents so you will remember what in the environment you are grateful for.

6. When you have finished, take apart your cairn(s) and scatter the rocks and stones. **Leave no trace of your cairn.**



The Back Story:

Stacking activities help develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills including cause-and-effect understanding, motor skills, eye-hand coordination, and a sense of balance. Stacking requires patience, creativity, and care.

Many of the rocks in the Arboretum were pushed here by a glacier thousands of years ago, and so they are rounded from all the tumbling and rubbing they experienced. Round rocks may be tricky to stack!

Cairn means “heap of stones” and is exactly that: a stack of rocks. People have been building cairns around the world for thousands of years,

including in South America, mountainous East Asia, the Arctic, and along coastlines.

Cairns had many purposes: to mark routes, help sailors navigate, store caches of food and supplies, commemorate a person or event, mark a burial site, express gratitude, or symbolize good luck and peace. North American native peoples used rocks to represent features and objects in the natural world around them. This helped them connect with their environment.

In some places it is not okay to move rocks and build cairns, because rocks help hold the soil together in fragile landscapes like deserts. Moving the rocks can disturb animals' habitats and cause soil erosion. In fact, it is illegal to build cairns in the National Parks in the United States.

It is okay to move rocks and build cairns in the Children's Discovery Forest at the Arboretum. We want you to feel connected with our environment and think about how grateful you are for the natural features in our Arboretum. We invite you to build a cairn to express your gratitude.