River Alive!

Learning Trail

Seek and Find

1. TREE TALK

You can call this "Elm Alley" because American Elm Trees line the walkway. They are native plants. That means they have grown here for a very long time. They do well in this environment. Elm trees can even make it through very cold Philadelphia winters.

Think about it! Trees talk to us in many ways. For a moment, focus on YOUR tree. What does it tell you?

What shape is the tree? Can you see the roots on the ground? What about the trunk, which is like the tree's body? Or the top layer of leaves and branches called the canopy? Do you think it loves the sun or the shade? What does your tree tell you about how the wind blows? Is it bigger or smaller than its neighbors?

Did you know? Trees stay connected to one another through an underground highway of fungi. (FYI: mushrooms are in the fungi family). Scientists call these roads mycorrhizae. Try to pronounce this word: "my-core-rise-eye." Older trees can have lots of connections. They can send extra food to help a variety of young or sick tree neighbors–like a truck driving food from the farm to the grocery store.

PHOTO CHALLENGE: Take a portrait of YOUR tree that captures its personality. Name your tree, too!

2. REFLECTION POOL

Bridges provide a unique look at the world below (sometimes high above the water)! Fisher's Lane Bridge is more than 200 years old. It's a popular fishing spot for Great Blue Herons.

Think about it! What do mirrors and water have in common? Imagine you are a Great Blue Heron patiently hunting at the water's edge. What might you see reflected on the surface of the water?

You might spot a heron at the streambank where land meets water. They wait in shallow water for the right moment to plunge their pointy beaks in the water to snatch a fish! It happens so fast, you might miss it.

Did you know? The wings of a heron can stretch from 5.5–6.5 feet wide when they fly. And these are very tall birds. They can be 3–4.5 feet tall. Stand up straight and stretch out your arms. Are you bigger than a heron?

PHOTO CHALLENGE: Check out the creek on both sides of the bridge. Look for ripples and bubbles or watch for smooth water. Capture what reflects on the surface of the water!

3. WILD SUNBATHERS

Painted Turtles live here in the creek. They have a pale pattern on the top of their shell, but underneath, their colors are bright like paint.

Think about it! Turtles are like people in some ways. We both absorb light from the sun. We need it to produce vitamin D. This helps our bodies absorb calcium so we have strong bones. Female turtles need vitamin D to make healthy eggs that they will lay in soft dirt near the creek.

Turtles like to bask in the sun on rocks and logs, or even float near the surface of the water. Basking is like sunbathing. The sun can create patterns of light on any surface–even on the surface of a puddle!

Did you know? Turtles use water to cool down and the sun to warm up to keep a comfortable body temperature. Do you ever sunbathe like a turtle?

PHOTO CHALLENGE: Look around. Can you find interesting textures and patterns in nature? Make these patterns the focus of your picture.

4. SMALL BUT MIGHTY

Mosses and lichen ("like-in") can look similar. You find them growing on trees, fallen logs, roots, walls, buildings, or rock. Mosses are simple plants without stems or flowers. They need their leaves to absorb water and they hold moisture like a sponge. Lichens don't have any leaves. They are a combination of fungus and algae. They make oxygen. When lichens are dry, they show vibrant colors like yellow and blue.

Think about it! Mosses grew here long before dinosaurs walked the Earth. They make the entire forest around you possible. They hold water for all the plants near them. Young trees called seedlings can get their start in life by growing in moss that keeps the ground around them moist.

Did you know? Lichens love clean air, like us. It is a good sign when you see them because you know the air around them is good for us to breathe too. That's why scientists call them indicator species. Indicator species help us understand the health of the natural world.

PHOTO CHALLENGE: Use your camera to zoom in on moss and lichen. Take a picture! How many different colors can you find?

5. ART IMITATES LIFE

Think about it! What does your home say about you? What does a nest say about a bird?

Great Blue Herons prefer to nest high in trees and often near other herons.

Belted Kingfishers dig nests in the creek bank called a burrow.

Peregrine Falcons nest in high places such as ledges on cliffs.

White-breasted Nuthatches make their home from natural holes in a tree (or a pre-drilled woodpecker hole).

Barn Swallows create mud nests tucked under bridges or underneath where a roof meets the wall of a building.

Did you know? Unlike humans, birds don't live in nests year-round. They live in them just long enough to hatch their eggs and raise their babies.

PHOTO CHALLENGE: If you were a bird living under this bridge, where would you make your nest? Take a picture of your imaginary bird home! Tell us why you chose it!

6. BEAVER'S BUFFET

Beavers are considered ecosystem engineers. As engineers, they make changes to the environment that help other species like birds and frogs!

Think about it! Beavers are famous for knocking down trees and building dams. But why do they do this?

The inner bark of trees is yummy food for beavers. They store branches underwater to munch on later–like a beaver refrigerator! They also use trees and branches to build dams or partially submerged beaver lodges. These actions create safe places for beavers and their babies to live.

Did you know? Beavers may be great allies as our shared climate continues to change. They vanished from Philadelphia for more than 300 years. But guess what, "They are back!"

PHOTO CHALLENGE: Can you find the signs that a beaver was here? Look for trees that have chew marks, or for the stumps of thinner trees that end in a point. Take a picture!

7. EDIBLE MEADOW

Foxes live here but they are hard to spot. Fox dens are underground. They build several entrances so a fox family can quickly hide or escape.

Think about it! Why would a fox family choose to live here?

Foxes and mice both hunt at night in this big grassy area. Mice eat seeds, berries, and insects. And foxes eat the mice. They also eat a lot of insects, too.

Did you know? The entire fox family helps raise the babies (called pups or kits). Older sisters and brothers will pitch in, too. They will hunt and bring food back for the pups.

PHOTO CHALLENGE: Many insects live in this grassy area. Get down to a bug's eye level and take a photo to capture the world as an insect might see it! Maybe you'll get lucky and spot a butterfly.

8. FLUTTER, WHOOSH, WHIRL!

Many fish are happy to live in the fast flow of water in this creek on either side of this tunnel. You might find over 10 different species of fish in one afternoon! But why do fish love to gather here?

Think about it! Just like humans, fish breathe oxygen. As water rushes over the rocks, oxygen gets mixed into the water.

Did you know? Fish don't breathe oxygen from the air. They breathe underwater through their gills. As water flows across the fish's gills, tiny blood vessels pick up the oxygen in the water. Blood vessels send oxygen to all parts of the fish's body – just like how blood moves oxygen around our body.

PHOTO CHALLENGE: Look into the water. Be patient. See if you can capture a picture of a fish. Name it!

Send your photos to #tcplearningtrail

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ANIMAL SIGNS
BONUS CHALLENGE!

Tracks: mud and sand are the best places to look for animal tracks.

Scat *(scientific word for poop)* - look but don't touch. Maybe you can see seeds or small bones or hair. If you know what the animal ate, you might be able to figure out what animal was there.

BE SAFE

Stay on the path to avoid poison ivy, stinging nettles, and ticks!

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I Street

Tookany Creek Park Trail

1. TREE TALK!
Catch some shade under native American Elm Trees. *Near I Street and Ramona Avenue Gateway!*

2. REFLECTION POOL
Find a new perspective and maybe a heron. *By Fisher's Lane Bridge!*

3. WILD SUNBATHERS
Bask in the sun like a colorful painted turtle. *Look for the painted turtle on the trail!*

4. SMALL BUT MIGHTY
Learn the difference between moss and lichen. *Look for the stone wall!*

5. ART IMITATES LIFE
Think about what our homes say about us. *Under Whitaker Avenue Bridge.*

6. BEAVER'S BUFFET
Discover how Beavers use the creek as an underwater refrigerator! *Near the Tabor Road Bridge.*

7. EDIBLE MEADOW
Look closely to explore a living ecosystem. *Near Rising Sun Avenue.*

8. FLUTTER, WHOOSH, WHIRL!
Pay close attention to what's below the surface. *Near the SEPTA Railroad Tunnel.*

E Cayuga St

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