

Junior Camper Field Guide



Let's explore and learn about camping with
Big City Mountaineers.





Whether you sleep under the stars in your own backyard, drive an RV to a nearby park or pitch a tent deep in the backcountry, camping is an exciting way to get out and enjoy the great outdoors.

Unplugging, getting outside and being surrounded by Mother Nature leaves a lasting impact. You can build confidence while camping by pushing your comfort zone, fostering a sense of responsibility, learning communication skills and developing problem-solving savvy.

Camping can even help you live a healthier and happier life. Increased exposure to fresh air, sunlight and physical activity while camping boosts the production of an important chemical in your brain called serotonin. So sleeping under the stars can actually help make you a Happy Camper!

Camping is also a great way to introduce early STEM concepts because science is everywhere you look in nature! From plant and animal life to astronomy and the observation of campfire chemical reactions, there are lessons in every corner of a campsite.

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Note: These activities are designed for kids ages 2–5, but can be modified for younger and older kids.



Activity 1

Create a Shelter!

Learn how to make a simple lean-to shelter by leaning sticks and other natural materials against an outdoor support.

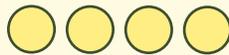
LENGTH OF ACTIVITY



**30 - 45
mins.**

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Required by adult:



Level of prep required:



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

**An assortment of branches and twigs—
the longer, the better!**

**Two extra-long sticks
(approx. 5') for main supports**

**A stable support wall
(tree, trunk, fence, rock wall, side of building, etc)**

**Natural materials
(brush, pine needles leaves and/or grass)**

Blanket for flooring (optional)

WHAT YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING:

- Hand-eye coordination and motor skills
- Early introduction to balance, pivot points and gravity
 - Spatial reasoning and awareness skills
- Considerations about scale, proportion and perspective



Activity steps on next page.



What you do:

If you have access to a backyard or open space with large trees and branches nearby, you can make a structure big enough for you to fit inside! Otherwise, you can make a miniature version with small twigs for your stuffed animals or action figures to enjoy.

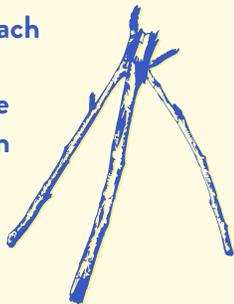
1
Locate an outdoor space with plenty of large sticks nearby.

2
Collect all of the natural materials you can find nearby, including lots of long sticks, branches, leaves and other natural materials.

**Be mindful to avoid poisonous plants, such as poison oak or poison ivy.*

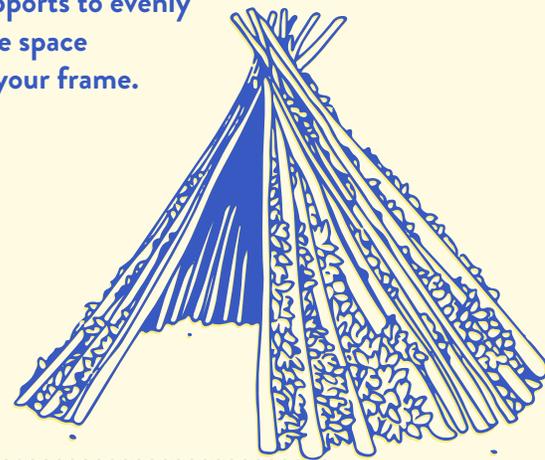
3
Stack your sticks in an organized pile and identify 3 long branches (approx. 5' long for a life-sized version) to service as your main structure supports—one with a branch fork at the end.

4
Lean each of the large support branches against each other to create your main support structure the shape of a cone and connect them by leaning the non-forked branches into the “forked” branch—adjust until these main supports are stable.



5
Lean sticks against the frame to build the walls, one at a time to make sure you fill all of the space.

6
Do so one by one to start, making sure the first layer is carefully laid against your supports to evenly fill in the space around your frame.



7
Continue to fill in the walls with branches, sticks and twigs, leaving an opening for a door.

8
To make your structure extra sound, jam dry leaves, bark or branches with pine needles between the branches to ‘thatch’ the walls/roof and fill in any holes.

9
Safety first! Have an adult or big kid adventure buddy check that your structure is sound before crawling inside.

10
Crawl inside and place your blanket on the ground for a cozy feel.



Alternative approach:

If you don't have access to an outdoor space, you can still practice your camping skills by building a shelter indoors!

INDOOR TENT SHELTER:

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- 1 Gather a lightweight sheet and as many large pillows as you can find in a cozy nook near a piece of large support furniture (e.g. couch, table, etc.)
- 2 Arrange your pillows around your intended shelter base and drape your sheet over your pillow "walls", using your nearby piece of large furniture as extra support.
- 3 Pull the sheet as tight as possible and weigh the edges down with heavy toys or books.
- 4 Depending on your design, you can try balancing a pole (think wrapping paper tube or ski pole) between the floor and in the center of your sheet for extra height and support.
- 5 If available, a large cardboard box can add dimension and interest by becoming a room divider, hallway or doorway inside your shelter.
- 6 Pull your favorite blankets and a flashlight or lamp inside to make your indoor campout shelter extra cozy.





Activity 2

Make a Lantern!

Get crafty by engineering a homemade light source to illuminate your camping adventure.

LENGTH OF ACTIVITY



30 - 40
mins.

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Required by adult:



Level of prep required:



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Empty tin can (*coffee or soup can works great*)

Adult-sized hammer
(*Child-sized hammer - optional*)

A few nails (*ideally a variety of sizes*)

Hand towel

Permanent marker (*to map your design*)

Wire for the handle
(*wire clothes hanger or a few pipe cleaners work great*)

Wire cutter pliers or industrial scissors

Battery-powered tea light candles or small flashlight

WHAT YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING:

- Fine motor skills as they manipulate the materials
- Hand-eye coordination as they pick up and place materials
- Early introduction to concepts of radiant energy and light



Activity steps on next page.



What you do:

1

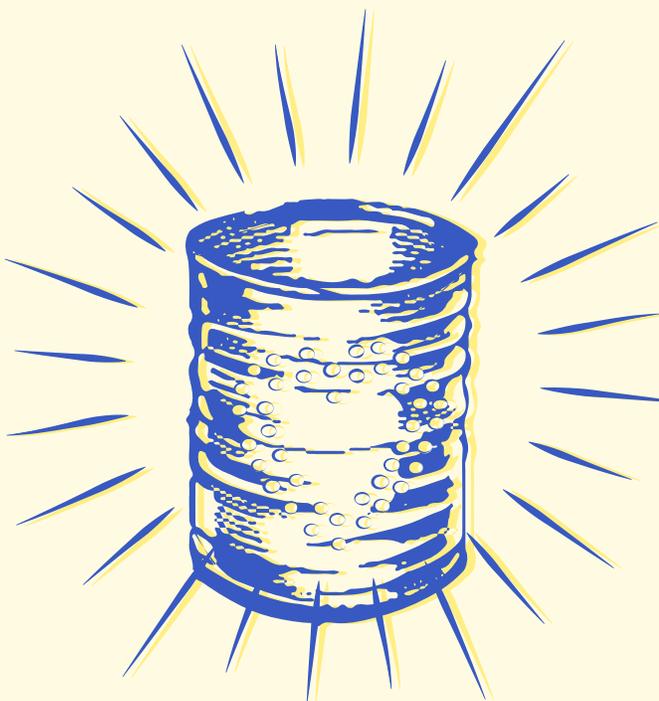
Fill your can with water and place it in the freezer overnight. This will help stabilize the tin when creating your lantern design the next day.

2

Remove the tin can from the freezer and dry off condensation from the can exterior with the hand towel.

3

Draw your design with your permanent marker by making dots on your tin can. Older kiddos can do this on a piece of paper in advance to spark inspiration and guide their design. Younger toddlers can do this freeform.



4

An adult or big kid adventure buddy can use a hammer to poke holes in the can wherever the dots are marked—positioning a towel underneath the tin can to help stabilize it before hammering.

Safety check! Young children should not handle a hammer or nails. If available, kiddos can practice with child-safe tools.

5

Clip the wire to make a section about 2' long (long enough so any heat from candles doesn't reach little hands!). Bend it into a loop and hook the ends through holes in the sides of the can and clamp the ends of the wire into hooks with your pliers to secure.

6

Add a battery-powered tea candle or a flashlight to the center of your lantern and test out your creation in the dark!

Safety check! Never play with candles, matches or fire. An adult can help you find an appropriate light source for your lantern.



Activity 3

Tell a Campfire Story!

Get creative by making up and sharing original campfire-worthy stories.

LENGTH OF ACTIVITY



Open
Ended

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Required by adult:



Level of prep required:



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Your imagination!

Paper and pen *(optional)*

Noise makers for added excitement
(optional)

WHAT YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING:

- Creativity and imagination!
- Early language development, including vocabulary exploration
 - Early introduction to narrative structure
 - Active listening skills



Activity steps on next page.



What to do:

- 1 Have an adult or a big kid adventure buddy print out this story starter sheet—or use a blank piece of paper to capture your campfire tale.

Don't have the means to draft your tale on paper? No problem! You can make up a story in your head and share the details out loud—and this is exactly what you do when camping!

- 2 Use your imagination to finish the campfire story starters prompted below:

Once upon a time, there was a big, friendly bear who lived in a cozy cave deep in the woods. The bear's name was...

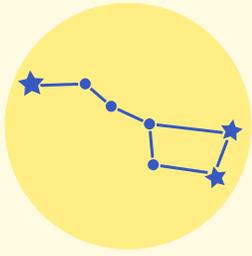
One night long ago, I was on a campout with my friends. It was a cool, dark night and we were singing campfire songs in the moonlight, when all of a sudden...

Some ideas for helping to structure the perfect campfire tale:

- Describe the story's setting
- Imagine and describe characters
- Identify a starting event (or problem)
- Explain how characters react to the event
- Make up a resolution to end your story
- Describe Who, What, When, Where and Why



BONUS! Use instruments (or pots, pans and spoons!) to add sound effects to your fireside tale. Sounds and music will add dimension and interest to your story, keeping your fellow campers excited and engaged as you share.



Activity 4

Constellation Mapping!

Get inspired to go stargazing by coloring star and planetary constellations.

LENGTH OF ACTIVITY



10 - 15
mins.

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Required by adult:



Level of prep required:



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Crayons, markers or colored pencils

Printed worksheet (see pg 12)
or blank page

WHAT YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING:

- Creativity! How to create art that represents places of outdoor play
 - Using color to create shapes and objects
 - Fine motor skills as they manipulate the materials
- Early introduction to astronomy—the study of objects in the sky



Activity steps on next page.

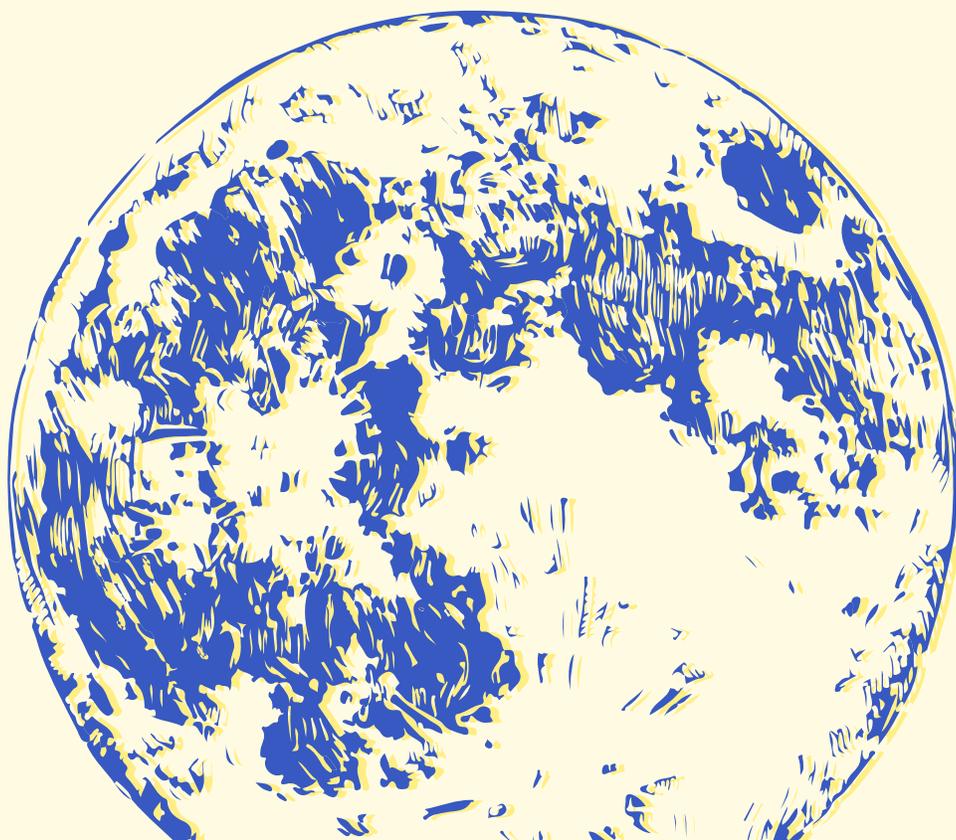


What to do: Create!

- 1 **Have an adult or big kid adventure buddy print the stargazing coloring sheet.**
Don't have access to a printer? No problem! Use a sheet of blank white paper to trace the scene.
- 2 **Bring the constellation to life by connecting the dots with your crayons, markers or colored pencils!**

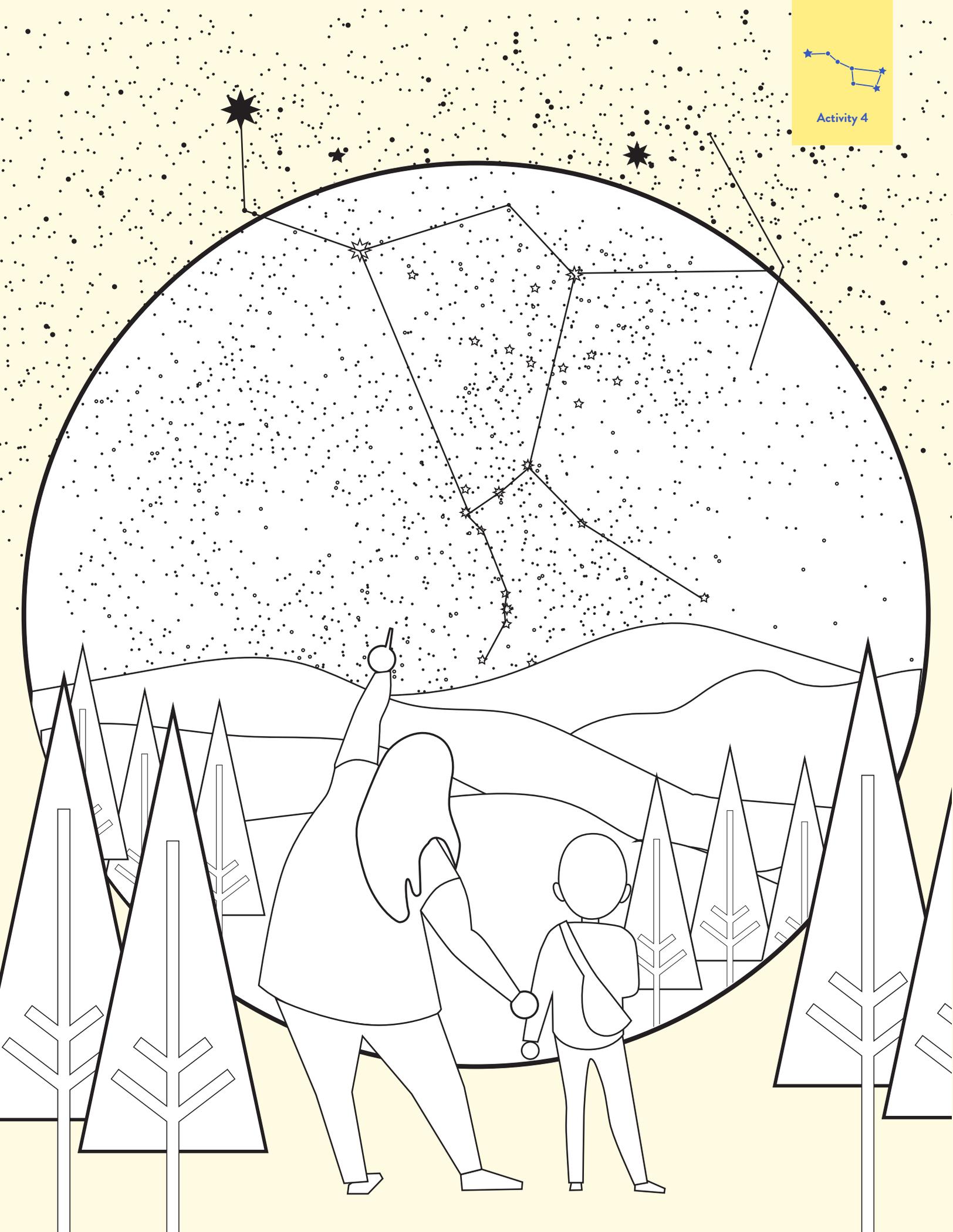


BONUS! *If the conditions are right (little or no moonlight, no clouds and permission to stay up past bedtime!) and you have access to an outdoor space away from street lights and headlights, go outside with an adult or big kid adventure buddy and go stargazing. If you have access, binoculars or a telescope will help you look a little closer—but this isn't necessary to enjoy the beauty of the night sky.*

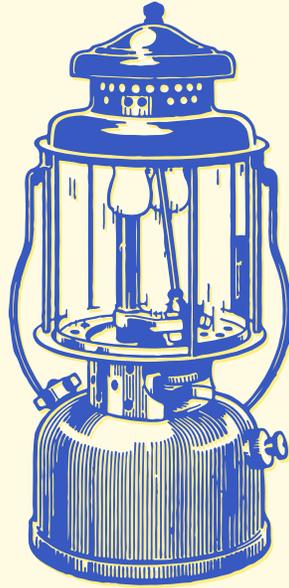




Activity 4



Camping Vocabulary Words:



CAMPSITE

CAMPFIRE

STARS

TRAIL

TENT

LANTERN

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*These activities were created in partnership with
KinderCare Education and Big City Mountaineers.*

Big City Mountaineers breaks down barriers to outdoor access for youth from disinvested communities by providing free, fully-outfitted and professionally-led backcountry trips for youth ages 8-18. For 30 years, they've partnered with youth development agencies in seven cities across the country to connect students with nature and reconnect them with their strengths, skills and resiliency. They offer overnight camps for youth ages 8-12 and their flagship, week-long backpacking or canoeing trips for youth ages 13-18.

Head to bigcitymountaineers.org to learn more.

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