Nature at night is a marvelous and magical world! We can observe so many things that are hidden in the day. Using the song “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes,” what can you find at night?

“Head”
Winter is the best time for birdwatching! Many birds, like owls and nightjars, are active in the night skies. Mammals like squirrels and opossums can also be found in the trees. Which animals can you find? Speaking of trees: what cones, berries, and buds can you discover above your head? Look for buds, too. These will pop out in the spring to make new leaves!

“Shoulders”
Winter is also the best time to find lichen! Lichen is a symbiotic (sym, “together,” + biotic, “living”) relationship between algae and fungi. These creatures can be found on the trunks of big trees like oaks and walnuts. They come in all sorts of colors, from gray to green to bright orange. See if you can spot some with your flashlight! Hint: they typically grow on the south side of trees.

“Knees & Toes”
The ground is covered with interesting things during winter! Try to find mosses and liverworts growing in cool, damp areas. Can you find any animal burrows for creatures like snakes and chipmunks? Do you hear a “crunch” when you walk? What makes that sound? Leaves? Pinecones? Try making a collage or fairy house out of the things you find.

“Eyes”
At night, we can’t see anything without the Sun. Or can we? In fact, the light we see from the moon and the planets comes from the Sun! The stars, like our Sun, make their own light. What planets and stars can you find? What makes a planet different from a star? Hint: “planet” means “wanderer” in Greek! What other lights can you find at night? How does the world look differently in the moonlight?

“Ears”
Sometimes we see animals at night, but more often, we hear them! Animals like hawks, owls, rabbits, deer, raccoons, skunks, opossums, dogs, and coyotes are active at night and can make quite a racket. Which animal sounds can you hear? On windy nights, listen for the sound the wind makes when it passes through the trees and grasses. What other sounds can you hear?

“Mouth & Nose”
On winter nights, we can often smell the smoke from fires at homes and campers—and taste their marshmallows! At Matthaei, we regularly have controlled burns in our prairie area. This fire helps keep the ecosystem healthy. Can you smell and feel the remains of this fire? Try drawing with some charcoal on the back of this sheet—it’s the oldest form of art! Other smells and tastes on winter nights include sap, pine needles, and snow. (Yes, it smells!) How many can you find?