# Picnic Table Contemplations:
## Nature fuels innovations

(All Seasons | Grades 2-8) • **Map Stop 8** • Table on the Rosemont Primary School side of the meadow, by the entrance from Mary Cliff Road

How does this area compare to the other spaces in the Nature Center?

### Background Information:

Due to human interaction, this is not a wild ecosystem. If you look around, you can see things that are part of the **natural environment** (such as wild grasses, trees, rocks, snag, soil, etc.) and also **manufactured things** made by humans (such as houses, lawn grass, playgrounds, fences, patio furniture, schools, manufactured dirt, mulch etc.).



Twelve Hills used to hold an **apartment complex** (some of the bricks in the ground are there due to the apartment buildings), and has been converted back to a prairie - as most open areas once were in Dallas. However, since it is manmade and still surrounded by urban environments, the prairie never can quite be returned to its original state.

Many people are working hard to return the land as close to that original state as possible,. When carefully tended to, we can help small pockets of "wild" land **survive and thrive** in midst of a city where it wouldn't ordinarily be able to on its own. Many **native prairie plants** continue to be planted by humans, and native wildlife is beginning to settle back in. The **trail** through the Nature Center, built and maintained by humans, makes the area easy to access with minimal disturbance to the environment, which means more people can **visit and learn**, and become interested in ways to help after spending time here. Although we can't build something exactly as nature does, we can build and protect spaces where nature can flourish, and work hard to fix what environments we have broken in the past. Just by coming to the Twelve Hills Nature Center and getting excited about what you discover here, you're already a part of something great! And with your **help and curiosity**, we'll be able to continue to cultivate and learn in the future.

### For the Activity:

Look around you; what differences do you see near the picnic table as compared to the prairie areas towards the entrance and across the trail, where you see land covered by grasses and flowers? What **observations** can you make about things that don't belong here? What observations did you make about **abiotic factors** throughout Twelve Hills?

What can humans do to create neighborhoods that protect nature? Is it necessary to get rid of natural environments to build neighborhoods? What would happen if everything was paved over, and there was little or no nature? How can we make a balance of nature and neighborhood in our own backyards?

You can see some of our thoughts and answers to these questions on the next page!

## OUR ANSWERS:

Notice that nothing is growing in the area surrounding the picnic table. The prairie areas surrounding the picnic table area  are covered in a seasonally changing assortment of native grasses and wildflowers. These plants provide food and shelter for insects, butterflies and moths, native bees, spiders, etc., which provide food for birds, lizards, snakes, etc. They are essential to the food chain.

There are man-made items throughout Twelve Hills. Some include bricks, tile, rebar, etc. left from when buildings occupied the site. Some others are the picnic table, fences, and the rock entrance wall. At Twelve HIlls, we've created a rich, diverse prairie among these mammade components.

It is not necessary to get rid of natural environments to build neighborhoods.   Native plants can be included in backyards, medians, and any open space. Anyone is able to include many of these essential plants in their own outdoor space. Even a small strip, three feet by one foot, or a flower pot full of some native plants will provide sustenance for our native wildlife.

An excellent book with information on creating native habitat in your backyard or balcony is *Nature's Best Hope, A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*, by Douglas W. Tallamy.