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Garden Of Wonder

I didn't care much about nature when I was in middle school. I liked field trips, though, because they meant getting out of class. So when my school planned a visit to the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, I signed up. On the day of the trip I sat on the bus half excited. When we arrived, I saw one of my favorite teachers, Ms. Ayala, waiting at the entrance. She always smiled in a way that made you feel seen. She taught with kindness and made learning fun. I really wanted to be in her group. The moment we stepped into the garden, everything felt different. The air felt cleaner and cooler. The sunlight warmed my face. The flowers were very bright and colorful. The paths led to beautiful surprises like a pond and a lot of butterflies. We split into groups, and I was lucky to join Ms. Ayala's. Walking with her I noticed many small things I had never seen before. I heard the calm sounds of the birds. I looked closely at the patterns on the leaves. I saw tiny insects exploring the soil. Ms. Ayala did more than name plants. She told stories about how they live and survive. Her stories made me more interested in nature. The most surprising plant was the titan arum, also called the corpse flower. It was huge. It blooms only sometimes and only for a short time. When it blooms, it smells very strong and bad. Ms. Ayala told us that the smell attracts insects like beetles and flies. The plant uses the smell as a trick to get pollinators. Standing close to it, I felt both interested and afraid. I learned that nature can be strange, beautiful, and smart. Something that smells horrible can still be beautiful in its own way because it helps the plant grow stronger and survive. That visit changed how I

saw and felt about nature. Before the trip, trees and plants just existed to me. At the garden I began to see how each plant plays a role in the world. I learned that nature has many parts that work all together. Ms. Ayala's simple and fun way of teaching helped me better understand the facts. But the feeling of being in a living place is what made me care the most. After the trip I started to notice nature around me almost every day. I would stop and breathe on walks to watch how light brightens the flowers or how insects work together. I began to think about where our fresh air and healthy food come from. I did not become an expert overnight. But, I felt I had a new responsibility. If nature gives us the things we need to survive, then we should protect it at all costs. More than facts, the trip gave me a new way to look at the world. Learning ecoliteracy means paying attention to relationships in nature and thinking about the consequences of our actions. Now I can make small changes like wasting less, caring more about green spaces, and thinking about how people and nature can do well together. Ms Ayala showed me how curiosity can become care and awareness. Years later I still remember that time in the garden, the quietness, the sun on my face, and the stories of every type of plant. That day didn't just make me interested in nature. It gave me an important reason to protect it. The garden was where my curiosity became a responsibility and where my ecoliteracy began.