

*Box 2.1. Practice with Observing the Landscape and Framing Questions*

Grab a notebook and pencil. Go outdoors and find a miniature landscape. This could be a flower box, a patch of weeds bordering the street or trail, the visitors' parking lot at a protected area, moss-covered stones, an abandoned field, a school yard, a cow pasture, the ground beneath a forest canopy, or the trunk of a large tree. Select and mark off a small parcel, of about 50 x 50 cm, that displays a fair amount of "patchiness" (heterogeneity) within its borders. First, carefully examine the landscape you've just demarcated. Then spend about five or ten minutes sketching a crude map of the major "ecological elements" the landscape contains—for example, different types or forms or patches of plants, bare soil, leaf litter, insects and spiders, stones, fallen twigs, cracks in the cement, pieces of trash, patches of sun and shade, crevices in or lichens on a tree trunk. Then, spend ten minutes or so thinking up and writing down at least five *questions* (more if possible) that spring to your mind regarding what you've noted within the parcel's boundaries. No restrictions apply to the subject matter or format of the questions. Feel free to poke at things with your fingers or a stick. Most important, don't hesitate to write down any question that occurs to you.

**Rule Number 1** is, *there is no such thing as a stupid question*. Some questions might lead more easily than others to firsthand inquiry (the theme of chapter 3), but all questions are valid as such. Once you feel at ease posing questions about what you see, you've mastered the most critical phase of scientific inquiry.