

EXPLORING NATURE THROUGH THE SENSES



This curriculum is an excerpt from an online K-8 resource on climate change and environmental racism that is currently being developed to be posted on etfo.ca. It will be free to all ETFO members and released in spring/summer 2021.

Lesson Title: Listening Walk

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Grade: 2

Lesson Big Ideas: Student friendly language, can be posted or reiterated throughout

- Time spent outside and connecting with the natural environment supports student well-being, including mental health and socio-emotional development.
- Natural spaces, and the benefits they provide to humans, are in danger of being lost due to climate change.
- Meaningful experiences outdoors will support students' learning about environmental issues outlined in the Ontario Curriculum (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/environment.html).

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS:

Connectedness, Environmental Racism & Climate Change

All students should have access to natural spaces in order to develop confidence, communication skills, cooperation, mindfulness and connectedness. But there exists a marked inequity in terms of Ontario students' access to wild, natural spaces.

CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

Big Ideas/Overall: Health and Physical Education

Social-Emotional Learning

- A1.2 apply skills that help them to recognize sources of stress and to cope with challenges, including help-seeking behaviours, as they participate in learning experiences in health and physical education, in order to support the development of personal resilience
- A1.3 apply skills that help them develop habits of mind that support positive motivation and perseverance as they participate in learning experiences in health and physical education, in order to promote a sense of optimism and hope

Daily Physical Activity

- B2.1 participate in moderate to vigorous physical activity, with appropriate warm-up and cool-down activities, to the best of their ability for a minimum of twenty minutes each day

Safety

- B3.1 demonstrate behaviours and apply procedures that maximize safety and lessen the risk of injury, including the risk of concussion, for themselves and others during physical activity
- B3.2, identify ways of protecting themselves and others, including those with medical conditions, from safety risks while participating in physical activity

Social Studies

- The climate and physical features of a region affect how people in that region live.

OVERVIEW (BRIEF):

This lesson aims to provide scaffolding for a diverse group of learners as they develop a sense of connectedness with the natural environment and an understanding of the socio-emotional benefits of time spent in nature.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Adult learning, references, data, etc.

Forest Bathing, a restorative walk in the woods, smelling pine needles, being present in the moment, are all activities which reduce anxiety and raise spirits. But not all students are comfortable spending time outside and in nature. Instead of having a calming effect, going outside can be anxiety-inducing for some leading to Ecophobia. Bubble-wrapped kids, may be fearful of ticks, bee stings, poison ivy, etc. While other students may have newly arrived from countries where time spent in the outdoors equals real danger.

“Although Canada’s natural environment is often touted as a unifying symbol of national identity, for many of the country’s first and second generation Canadians, Canadian nature can be a wild and frightening place”.

For example, Syrian students who had been living in refugee camps, leaving the warm, safe classroom to jump in puddles and play in the mud may be confronting.

For younger students, our future change agents, being comfortable outside and experiencing the socio-emotional benefits of nature-based learning first hand is essential. As climate change threatens many beloved natural spaces whether close by (e.g., Key Findings: The National Capital Commission’s Climate Change Adaptation Initiative) or faraway (e.g., mountain pine beetle outbreak in the Yukon), we will want all of their voices around the table, talking, planning, and acting when habitats are in danger.

MATERIALS:

Nature journals and writing tools

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How do we connect with nature?
- What are the socio-emotional benefits of connecting with nature?
- How does connecting with nature differ from being outside during recess?
- What impact do human choices have on the natural environment?
- How might we reduce the impact of human behaviour on the natural environment?
- What would be lost if wild, natural spaces disappeared?

LESSON PLAN FRAMEWORK

Access to Clean Water Template Sample

CONNECT:

- Connect with students and their interests and experiences
- Connect students with each other
- Connect students with community (experts, resources)

STEPS:

1. Community circle: How do we connect with nature? Read “The Listening Walk” by Paul Showers or another book which encourages students to focus their noticing



on the sounds they hear on the schoolyard (e.g., “The Other Way to Listen” by Byrd Baylor).

2. Guided walk: What sounds do you hear on the schoolyard? Invite students to follow along on a predetermined path around the school yard, stopping and focusing on sounds from both the built and natural environment. During the active mediation, it is important for students to remain quiet during this activity so that everyone might hear the symphony of sounds outdoors. In the book “The Listening Walk” the main character says: “On a listening walk, I do not talk.”

3. Take your well-being pulse: How do you feel after connecting with nature? What are the socio-emotional benefits of connecting with nature? Some students may feel calm, happy while others may feel uncomfortable with the quiet. This is a great opportunity to co-regulate alongside students who may feel anxious when spending time outside.

**Be sure to provide clear exploration guidelines (e.g., how far they may explore, the signal to return to homebase, etc.).*

EXPLORE + EMPOWER:

- Explore a variety of resources available to you
- Empower students to make meaning of the big idea

STEPS:

4. Connecting to nature using the senses: What do you see, hear, smell on the schoolyard? As a whole group, prompt students to notice their surroundings. Offer a prompt to support students who may spend less time in nature or who are uncomfortable with the ambiguity of open ended questions: e.g., “Find 3 things you hear, 2 things you see, 1 thing you smell.”

5. Partner up: What do you see when you look down? When you look upwards? Using empty picture frames allows students to use their observation skills with a clear focus. Children who do not spend a lot of time outside may see “nothing.” The frames serve as a tool to focus their noticing.



6. Community Circle: How does connecting with nature differ from being outside during recess? Draw a contrast between being outside during recess and connecting with nature during outdoor exploration time, providing vocabulary for students to express themselves (e.g., sense of calm, agitated, peaceful, excited, etc.).

ACT + ADVOCATE:

- Create experiences where students have engagement and agency
- Take action in your local community

7. Assessing impact of human behaviour on the natural environment: Which sounds did you hear on the schoolyard? In an urban setting, students are likely to hear more cars, trucks, and noises made by humans than natural sounds. They may be more likely to hear an airplane flying overhead than the birds that call the schoolyard home.

**Students may notice the increase or decrease of human-made sounds pre and post pandemic.*

8. Walk to school day: How might we reduce the impact of human behaviour on the natural environment? Invite students to use critical thinking skills, to take action on environmental issues, such as reducing their carbon footprints associated with the school run. Organizing events

such as a Walking School Bus or Ontario Active School Travel's Winter Walk Day (ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca/winter-walk-day/) in collaboration with other students, educators, administrators and community members.

REFLECT + SHARE:

- Reflect on the big idea
- Reflect on learning that has occurred
- Share learning with others

STEPS:

9. Sit Spots: How can connecting with nature promote well-being? Invite students individually to find a spot on the schoolyard where they will sit and just be for 7-15 minutes (depending on the comfort level of the students) and breathe in their natural surroundings.

10. Reflection Journal: What do you notice about your corner of the world? What would be lost if our wild, natural spaces disappeared? While some students may enjoy the peace and quiet of a sit spot, others may feel restless and might appreciate having a journal to write or draw in to focus their attention, including these writing prompts for sit spots (childhoodbynature.com/sit-spots-noticing-the-details-writing).

EXTENSIONS & MODIFICATIONS:

See Learning Trails (thinkingoutside.ca/on-the-school-grounds). E.g., Looking walk - use picture frames to focus noticing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Publications, websites, videos, downloads, etc.

Climate Change References:

Key Findings: The National Capital Commission's Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (ncc-ccn.gc.ca/our-plans/climate-change-adaptation-initiative)

Yukon Forest Health Report 2019 - Mountain pine beetle, p.41-46 (yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/emr/emr-2019-yukon-forest-health-report.pdf)

References for student-led action on climate change:

David Sobel - *Helping Children Love the Earth* (dimensionsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/helping-childrenlovetheearth.pdf)

Mindfulness Resources:

Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature, Jon Young, Ellen Haas, Evan McGown

Sit Spots (wildernessawareness.org/articles/sit-spots/)

Sit Spots and Noticing the Details in Writing (childhoodbynature.com/sit-spots-noticing-the-details-writing)

Nature and Well-Being:

Connecting Canadians with Nature (parks-parcs.ca/canadian-parks-council-key-initiatives/)

Curriculum Documents:

Environmental Education, 2017 Scope and Sequence (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/environment.html)

BOOKS FOR STUDENTS:

The Listening Walk, Paul Showers

The Other Way to Listen, Byrd Baylor*

A Walk in the Forest, Maria Dek

The Hike, Alison Farrell*

The Golden Glow, by Benjamin Flouw

A Stone Sat Still, Brendan Wenzel

A Walk Through the Woods, Louise Greig

The Quiet Book, Deborah Underwood