

SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Nature Name Game

GRADES: 1-8 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - SCIENCE

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Classroom Community, Equity & Inclusion

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. Each student chooses an animal to pair with their name. Animal options should start with the same sound, such as Osprey Oscar or Porcupine Penelope (see 'Activity Options' for variations). Students may brainstorm with a friend or teacher until they find a nature name they like.
2. Sit in a circle outside and ask each student to share their nature name. Go around the circle 2 or 3 times. Challenge students to memorize every nature name and take any volunteers who want to try to recite every nature name in the class.
3. For added challenge introduce this activity:
 - The student on your left says her name ("Ant Annie")
 - The student to their left says the names already shared, ending with their own name. Repeat. ("Ant Annie, Bear Brock," "Ant Annie, Bear Brock, Cat Cara")
 - Students farther along the circle will have a greater challenge. As a finale, the teacher should attempt to say every nature name ending with their own.

TEACHER PROMPTS: The intention of this activity is to build familiarity with everyone's names and to 'break the ice' of a new social setting. Help students who may feel put on the spot or allow them to pass. Create a space that welcomes mistakes, silliness & laughter.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

Depending on the age of your class, add challenges by using different parameters:

1. Nature names could include any living thing or aspect of nature (Waterfall Wendy or Sunflower Sara)
2. Alternately, give students the option to choose rhyming nature names (Bobcat Matt, Berry Terry, etc.)



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Nature Name Noodle

GRADES: 1-8 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Classroom Community, Equity & Inclusion

MATERIALS: A 2-3 foot length of foam pool noodle (you can cut them with a bread knife). Optionally 2 extra 'noodle swords' to allow for up to 3 concurrent games.

ACTIVITY:

1. This activity works as a good follow up to "Nature Name Game" above.
2. Sit in a circle with feet pointing inward. Review everyone's nature names.
3. The teacher starts as 'it' in the centre of the circle and gets to hold the noodle. One student starts by saying their nature name and any other nature name. 'It' tries to tap the feet of that person before they can say their own name and someone else's name. Annie passes it to Cara by saying "Ant Annie - Cat Cara!"
4. If students need more time to think of someone's name, widen your circle to make it harder for 'it.' Scooch in toward the middle to make it easier for 'it.'
5. The teacher can continue to play as 'it', or give responsible students the opportunity to wield the noodle. When a student doesn't get the words out in time, they get to play as the new 'it'.
6. Pause the game after a few rounds and ask to review the nature names of any students who have not been called on. This creates an opportunity for the class to practice inclusion rather than always choosing their friends.

TEACHER PROMPTS: Run interference on any student who always calls on their best friend. Debrief by discussing how it feels to be included versus left out. Ask the students "What kind of community do we want to have in our class?" Discuss ways to include everyone.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

- Once everyone understands the game, consider breaking up the circle into two or three smaller circles to give everyone more playtime.
- If you find that some students try to 'lose' intentionally in order to control the noodle, introduce a rule that each student can only be 'it' once.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Nature Name Toss

GRADES: 1-8 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Teamwork, Cooperation, Classroom Community, Equity & Inclusion

MATERIALS: A stopwatch or wristwatch. A beanbag, rubber chicken or other 'tossable'. Avoid balls that bounce or roll. For added fun, bring a backpack with an assortment of stuffies and random toss-ables to introduce later on in the game.

ACTIVITY:

1. This activity works as a good follow up to "Nature Name Game" or "Nature Name Noodle" above.
2. Stand in a medium-sized circle so that most students can toss the object underhand to other students. Review everyone's nature names.
3. The teacher calls out a student's nature name and tosses the object to that person. Invite that student to choose someone else to toss to and memorize that person. Ask the class to throw in such a way that each person has it once.
4. Remind students to call out the nature name and make eye contact before tossing. Ensure that each student gets it once, ending with the teacher.
5. Practice tossing in this same pattern once or twice, reminding students to throw to the same person as before.
6. Begin timing the toss-pattern. Challenge the class to achieve its best time.

TEACHER PROMPTS: This is a cooperative challenge in which students practice self-regulation to make calm underhand tosses. Remind students to throw in a way that is easy to catch. Emphasize the importance of making eye contact and calling out the nature name before each throw.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS: This game becomes more fun with multiple toss-ables. Try:

- Two, three or five different objects in succession.
- One object moving forwards through the pattern and a different object moving backwards. To do this, practice the reverse pattern by asking students to 'throw to the person who used to throw to you.' Then put backwards and forwards together.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Birthday Circle Up

GRADES: 1-8 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Classroom Community, Equity & Inclusion

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. Go outside and gather the entire class.
2. Have students order themselves into a circle by birthday, so that a complete circle is formed with the student with the first birthday in January sitting or standing beside the student with the last birthday in December.
3. Once the circle is established, have each student introduce themselves to the individuals on either side of them.
4. To take it further, each student can be asked to find out something about the person to the left of them (hobby, favourite song/movie/book, etc). Starting somewhere in the circle – perhaps with the birthday closest to the date of this activity - the first student will introduce the student to their left - their name, birthday, and the piece of information.

TEACHER PROMPTS:

The intention of this activity is to get to know people in your class, and to be inclusive. It promotes interactions with students that might otherwise be in separate social groups, and provides immediate information that can connect them with other students in the class.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

When grade-appropriate, add a rule that the organization has to be accomplished without speaking.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Mental Vacation

GRADES: K-8 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Wellness, healthy living, responsibility

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. Take your class outside. A natural space is best but anywhere quiet will work.
2. Ask students to lie down on the ground.
3. Ask them to imagine their favourite outdoor place. They are to picture being there in their minds.
4. Prompt them to remember the feeling of the air, imagine the smells, textures and sounds.
5. Tell the students that they will have two minutes of silence to visit this special place.
6. After the exercise reinforce that anyone can take a mental vacation to help create thoughts of relaxation and calm whenever feelings of trouble, anger or stress arise. This practice can improve happiness and health.

TEACHER PROMPTS:

The intention of this activity is to teach students a simple technique for improving happiness and mental health. Ask students:

- 1) Why did you choose the place that you did?
- 2) How did you feel when you were there?
- 3) When could this activity benefit you in everyday life?

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

As a follow-up activity students could write about / draw a picture of / create a song about / describe orally to a friend their favourite place.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Natural Object Inquiry

GRADES: K-6 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - SCIENCE

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Inquiry, Creativity

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. Students will be finding natural objects that they can bring back for an inquiry activity. These may be items such as pebbles, leaves, dandelions, small sticks, etc.
2. Take the class on a walk around the school building and through any natural areas in the schoolyard, giving them time to choose an item. Alternately, give students 5 minutes to wander independently within schoolyard boundaries, returning at your signal.
3. Choose a method to form partner groups. Ask students to study their object and create an observational statement beginning with the words “I notice...” Give students time to share with their partners.
4. Ask students to study their object and create an inquiry statement beginning with the words “I wonder...” Give students time to share with their partners.
5. Ask if anyone wants to share their noticings or wonderings with the class.

TEACHER PROMPTS:

Use this activity to introduce nature inquiry to your students. This is especially helpful if your students do not normally spend unstructured time in nature. Explain that ‘noticing’ and ‘wondering’ are the starting points for nature appreciation and for scientific investigation.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

- Some teachers may invite students to bring their objects inside to create a drawing, poster, or graphic.
- For Junior or Intermediate students, consider starting a nature journal that can be taken outside during nature inquiry time. Nature journals can include sketches, observations, diagrams and questions. Nature journaling works great through the seasons.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Natural Object Storytime

GRADES: K-6 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - LANGUAGE, SCIENCE

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Inquiry, Creativity

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. This activity works as a good follow up to “Natural Object Inquiry” above.
2. Students should have a natural object that they can hold. Alternately, ask students to choose a living tree or plant in the schoolyard. This activity works well individually, or in partner groups.
3. After noticing and wondering about the natural object or living thing, ask students to make up a name for it as if it were an individual person or friend.
4. Pose the question “If your object was a character in a story or song what would they do?” Invite students to make up fictionalized stories, poems or songs that feature their object as a character.
5. Prompt creativity with questions like “What are their likes and dislikes? Do they have hobbies? Friends? What are they afraid of?”

TEACHER PROMPTS: Many students may hesitate at first since this activity is so open-ended. Taking time to pair and share ideas can help these students get inspiration from their peers.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

- Kindergarten and Primary students can share their ideas aloud in small groups or with the class. How could we incorporate these stories into dramatic play?
- For Junior or Intermediate students, consider starting a nature journal that can be taken outside during nature inquiry time. Nature journals can include poems, stories, sketches, and songs.
- Encourage students to draw or doodle in their nature journal as you read a story to them outside.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Schoolyard Time Machine

GRADES: 1-8 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - SOCIAL STUDIES, MATH

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Classroom Community, Equity & Inclusion, Creating Sense of Place, Indigenous Reconciliation

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. Go outside.
 2. Divide the class into 3 groups. Assign each group the following questions, with one group imagining that they are 10 years back in time. The second group imagines themselves 100 years back in time, and the third group imagines themselves 1000 years back in time.
 3. Have students attempt to answer the following questions: What grew in this place? What animals lived here or used this land as part of their habitat? Who lived in the area around what is now our school?
 4. Students rejoin the main group and describe how they imagine their schoolyard looked and was used at different points in history.
-

TEACHER PROMPTS:

The intention of this activity is to get students to understand how the land changes over time in terms of biodiversity and human geography. It also opens up discussions about Indigenous treaties and land claims. This activity could also be a jumping off point for math - integers, exponents, multiples of 10.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

Any time periods or intervals could be used.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Ant Buffet

GRADES: K-4 PRIMARY/JUNIOR - SCIENCE, LANGUAGE ARTS

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Observation, Creating Sense of Place, Mapping

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. Go outside.
2. Find an ant hill in the schoolyard. Observe where the ants from the anthill go. Estimate how far they go. Estimate how many there are.
3. Place certain food objects around the anthill, for example, an apple core, a piece of bread, a spoonful of sugar, a carrot.
4. Is there an immediate change in the ants' behaviour?
5. Return to the anthill the next day. Can you see a food preference for the ants? Have the ants changed their patterns of travel? Have ants from other anthills found the food? Are the ants working cooperatively or competing for food?

TEACHER PROMPTS:

The intention of this activity is to get students to pay attention to living things on a small scale. The activity encourages students to view their schoolyard as habitat, and not just a play area.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

Move food around. Add other food for the ants. Make a trail of sugar or juice. Do the ants follow it? Write a story from an ant's perspective. "The Day the Donut Came."



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

30 cm Safari

GRADES: 1-6 PRIMARY/JUNIOR - SCIENCE, SOCIAL STUDIES, ART

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Observation, Creating Sense of Place, Mapping

MATERIALS: 30 centimetre ruler, objects to act as corners, a clipboard, paper and pencil

ACTIVITY:

1. Collect materials: A ruler for each student and four objects to mark the corners of their squares (or a 2 metre-long piece of string), clipboard and paper.
2. Have students use the ruler to measure out a 30cm square. Use your preferred material (or any natural material) to mark the corners.
3. Have students start by making a list of everything they can see on the surface. Alternatively they can draw everything.
4. After a few minutes ask them to look deeper by picking through the leaf litter, mulch and soil. Ask them to turn over leaves and rocks. Add what they find to their lists or drawings.
5. When finished, have the students carefully replace everything they moved so that the area looks as untouched as possible.

TEACHER PROMPTS: Focusing your attention on a very small area and looking closely can reveal all sorts of interesting surprises. Follow up the activity with questions like: 1) How many different types of plants did you find? 2) What new things did you notice when you looked deeper? 3) Did you find any insects or worms in your square? Where did you find them?

ACTIVITY OPTIONS: Repeat the activity in different habitats in the schoolyard in order to compare and contrast them. Ask the students how their study areas compare, and what might explain any differences they observe.

Consider having the students make a list of what they expect to find before going outside. Compare this list with what they actually find.

Enrich the experience by bringing any of the following: magnifying glasses, trowels or spoons, small containers and identification keys for local wildlife (downloadable on the OEE website), cameras.

Source: https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/Learn_CCSC_Nature-Learning-Downloads_Square-Foot-Safari.pdf



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Sound Map

GRADES: K-6 PRIMARY/JUNIOR - SCIENCE, SOCIAL STUDIES, ART

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Observation, Creating Sense of Place, Mapping

MATERIALS: Clipboard, paper, pencil

ACTIVITY:

1. Go outside.
2. Find a spot for the class to sit silently in the schoolyard with a journal, or a clipboard and a piece of paper.
3. Students should draw a stick figure of themselves in the middle of the page.
4. Listen for sounds. When students hear a sound, they should create a symbol for that noise and place it on the page where it was heard in relation to themselves.
5. Add the symbol to a legend.
6. Try to get students to carry out the activity in silence for 15 minutes.

TEACHER PROMPTS:

This is a good way to introduce the concept of scale, as some students who hear a noise far away will intuitively want to put the symbol on the sound map farther away from their stick figure.

Students should keep their maps facing the same way during the exercise, so that all of the students' maps can be oriented in the same way for discussion.

The teacher may want to get the students to add a landmark on their map (perhaps the school building) in order to give a starting point for the scale of their maps, and make it easier for all students to orient their maps.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

Give students larger pieces of paper so that they can demonstrate scale in a better way. The teacher could make an obvious noise and see how students indicate the position of the sound on their respective maps.



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Habitats Map

GRADES: 4-7 JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - GEOGRAPHY, SOCIAL STUDIES, ART

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS: Observation, Creating Sense of Place, Mapping

MATERIALS: Clipboards, pencils, paper

ACTIVITY:

1. Collect materials: clipboards, pencils, paper
2. Go outside and walk the school grounds. If permitted, consider exploring a local neighbourhood or park.
3. Observe landmarks that students can add to their maps for orientation.
4. Point out a habitat to the class and describe the living things that live there.
5. Ask the students to observe and record examples of any habitats and/or ecosystems they recognize on the walk.
6. Have students describe the living things in each of their habitats even if they don't know the names.
7. Note impressions.

TEACHER PROMPTS: Ask questions such as: 1) What habitats/ecosystems are in our area that support living things? 2) How are these habitats/ecosystems connected to our lives? 3) What actions affect the ecosystems both positively and negatively? 4) What environmental topics are relevant to our local school community? 5) What is here for human use and what is here for other living things?

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

1. Exchange maps with a classmate and see if you can follow it and find the habitats recorded.
2. Have the students add notes to how they use the different habitats during recess or outside of school hours.
3. Ask the students to give fun names to different parts of the school yard.
4. Pick a place in the school yard that is special to your students and have them draw it on their map. Use this space for future schoolyard learning.

<https://www.back2nature.ca/teachers-guide-into-nature-english/>



SCHOOLYARD LEARNING

Monarch Waystation Location

GRADES: 1-8 PRIMARY/JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE - SCIENCE

LEARNING SKILLS AND WORK HABITS:

ACTIVITY:

1. Introduce what a [Monarch Waystation](https://schools.wrdsb.ca/environmental-education/nearby-nature/monarch-waystations/) is, and its purpose:
<https://schools.wrdsb.ca/environmental-education/nearby-nature/monarch-waystations/>
2. In small groups, have students walk around the entire school yard looking for a suitable location where a Monarch Waystation might potentially be installed (if/when approved). This area will need to be sunny for most/all of the day, as the milkweeds and nectaring plants grow in full sun, with dry soil. It is also important to choose a location that is not used by students - the middle of the soccer field is not a suitable location, although it might meet the growing conditions of the plants.
3. Ask students to remember the area that they feel is most suitable, and the reasons for their decision.
4. After giving an adequate amount of time for exploration, have everyone gather back as a class.
5. Ask each group to take the class to the spot they felt would be most suitable, and while there, explain their rationale.

TEACHER PROMPTS:

The intention of this activity is to become more familiar and comfortable with your school yard, facilitate student interactions, provide students the opportunity to have input within their school setting, all while helping an endangered species.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

Students could be given a printed map (Google Maps screenshot) of the schoolyard to help them mark locations and make notes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Also check out www.wrdsb.ca/monarchmadness and www.journeynorth.org/monarchs

