

AWARENESS BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Use these short, adaptable activities to warm up, set expectations, be intentional with your observations, or reflect on the day. Incorporating them into your outdoor routine will help to better connect your students with place.

ASSESSING RISK

What If?

Engage students in a site risk assessment before beginning any outdoor activities.

- In your outdoor space, have students identify potential hazards (e.g. what if we found a broken glass bottle?) and their associated risks (e.g. we could get cut). Consider both realistic and unrealistic ideas, but be sure to cover likely scenarios.
- Discuss how to avoid hazards, dispose of litter or adapt your plans to reduce these risks.
- Students provide some 'what ifs,' their perspectives and courses of action, but it's ultimately up to you to establish appropriate risk thresholds for your class. Identify whether an activity is 'bumps and bruises,' 'broken bones,' or 'emergency,' and consider a discussion on appropriate levels of risk.

Identifying Hazards

Brief students on how to manage potential hazards they may encounter outdoors.

Begin with an introduction to traffic light colours and their meanings by playing a game of Red Light, Green Light. Gather students and discuss how to apply those concepts to potential hazards in the park.

Some suggested questions:

- What are some examples of 'red lights' (i.e., dangers or off-limit areas)? Are there any 'yellow lights'?
- What should be reported to the teacher?
- What is something that the teacher doesn't need to know about?
- What is an appropriate distance to keep from different hazards?

Next, have students explore the area in small groups and practise identifying potential hazards.

MAKING OBSERVATIONS

I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me Of (INIWIRMO)

Help your students develop a curious mindset and use language tools to engage with nature.

- Have students explore an outdoor space with a partner to find something that catches their attention.
- Have them describe the object with sentences that start with “I notice...”
- Return to the group and share observations.
- Have them move into “I wonder...” and finish with “It reminds me of...” Say these out loud so it becomes a habit.

You can call this “in-nee-worm-o” (based off the acronym). Start with the full activity (found at beetlesproject.org) and repeat as a warm-up.

Sensory Wake-up

Encourage your students to use all of their senses to explore.

- Review the five senses and have students consider how different animals depend on their senses.
- Spend a few moments tuning in to the sense of smell, sight, hearing and touch. Have students warm up their senses one by one by taking a few deep breaths in and out; looking up, down and all around; listening quietly for 30 seconds; then wiggling, clapping, and snapping their fingers.
- Have students warm up their sense of taste by sticking their tongues out to taste the air or rain drops. Use this as an opportunity to remind students not to eat things found in nature.

Have students volunteer to lead a portion of this routine once they are familiar with it.

Nature Walk

A good theme and some prompts can help set purpose and focus for your outdoor visit. Consider using Gillian Judson’s Walking Curriculum as a starting place.

Secret Observations

Practise using and interpreting descriptive words in a drawing activity.

- Each student needs two index cards and a pencil. Have students search an area for a natural item smaller than their hand. Students record their observations (e.g., texture, shape, smell, size) in their own words on one side of the index card.
- Keeping their object hidden, have each student read their observations to a partner and then trade cards.
- The partner then draws an image of what they think the secret object looks like on the back of the card. The pair then share their drawings and discuss how accurate they were.
- Repeat the activity on a second card using the same object, but with a different partner. Students should consider adjusting their written descriptions to see if they can end up with a more accurate drawing.
- Gather in a circle to share drawings and the actual objects. Reflect and discuss findings.

Forest Freeze Game

Encourage students to explore the urban forest from different perspectives.

- After providing boundaries and instructions, have students explore an area and make observations using their senses. They should shift their eye level by crouching low or standing on their tiptoes. They will need to listen for the cue to “freeze” or “unfreeze.”
- Call “freeze.” Students should stop and closely observe the small area immediately around them, recording (through words or pictures) what they discover.
- Call “unfreeze.” Have students return to a larger exploration area until you call “freeze” again.
- Return to the group to share findings.

JOURNALLING AND REFLECTING

Sit Spots

Encourage each student to choose a sit spot, or microsite, where they can connect to a single place in nature.

- Choose an area where students can safely spread out and sit at least two arms' lengths from each other.
- Have students journal and reflect, sit quietly to observe their surroundings, sketch, draw, read or write.
- Return to these same spots regularly.

Reading, Writing and Storytelling

Move story time or quiet reading/writing outdoors. Allow time for students to be inspired by their surroundings through poetry, creative stories or free writing.

Rock, Stick, Leaf Debrief

After an activity, gather as a group and discuss:

- something that rocked (your favourite part or thing)
- something that's going to stick (a takeaway or something you don't want to forget)
- something you want to leave behind (something that didn't go so well)



Story of the Day (Sharing Circle)

As a final activity, gather in a circle and share highlights of your park visit. This can be as informal or as formal as you'd like! Model telling dramatic, descriptive, and five-sensory stories. Some ideas to get you started:

- Act your day out.
- Describe your day in a word.
- Map out each activity you did as a group.
- Answer a specific reflection question.



Surrey Parks works together with the community to celebrate nature and protect the environment.

Visit us online to plan your park visits, connect with nearby nature and help your students become stewards of our urban forest.