

Nature Play/Forest Days

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Grade level: Kindergarten and First Grade

Goals of this unit: Students will become familiar with and have opportunities to explore nature outdoors in our forest space using a combination of unstructured play and structured learning activities to gain knowledge and an appreciation of the environment. Students will develop the responsibility, critical thinking and cooperation needed to create a safe, kind and gentle experience.

Essential questions to consider:

What kinds of plants and trees do you notice on our way to and around our Nature Play space?

What are special features in our Nature Play area?

What are the patterns that you notice as you observe in your sit-spot?

How has the area changed from our first day out here until the end of the year?

How have the trees, flora and fauna changed?

What do you hear as you observe at your sit spot?

Where is the sun when we are out here? How does it change over time?

What is the temperature, weather? How does this affect what you observe?

How does what you wear to be comfortable in your sit spot change over time?

What different sounds do you hear in our nature play area?

Engage: Late summer wildflower walk (collect and guided drawing)

Study of Milkweeds in pollinator area.

Scavenger hunt for leaves, nuts, bones, quills, feathers.

Collect one small thing and bring to the blanket. (Play I spy)

What tracks, if any, do you notice in the soil, mud or snow?

Choose a sit-spot. What made you choose this as your sit-spot? What is special about it?

Close your eyes, what do you hear? How does this change over time?

Winter changes with snow and ice. How do observations and play change?

Measure plants near the brook in the spring.

Students will understand:

1. The similarities and differences of native wildflowers.
2. The similarities and differences of conifers (bark, needles, cones).
3. The similarities and differences of deciduous trees (bark, leaves, seeds).
4. The animals that might live in the area of our school campus and whether they hibernate or are active during the winter.
5. The winter food source of an active animal.
6. The characteristics of, and how to identify tracks left by animals in the snow.
7. How the temperature affects freezing and thawing of water, snow, ice.
8. Importance of safety while playing and working in the woods.
9. Importance of respect for the habitat, living things and responsible collecting.
10. Signs of spring- how does the weather affect tree buds?

Students will know: Conifer, deciduous, needles, leaves, buds, pollinators, hibernate, migrate, predator, prey, pollinator, herbivore, carnivore, omnivore, cloud types, temperature, freeze, thaw, solid, liquid.

Students will be able to: (practices)

1. describe examples of safe, kind and gentle behaviors of themselves and peers.
2. create a careful, thoughtful entry in Nature Journal.
3. read a thermometer and record temperature in Nature Journal.
4. draw a map of the play space.
5. listen to a "theme" fiction or nonfiction book and retell using natural, found objects.
6. measure height of plants near brook in the spring.
7. play cooperatively, problem solve, communicate effectively.
8. take a turn at creating a post to accompany photo(s) on "Classroom Dojo" page.

Assessments of learning:

- *Students will be able to stay quietly in their sit spots for 5 minutes increasing to 15 minutes by the end of the school year.
- *Students will show interest and engagement of their surroundings through the quality of their Nature Journal entries.
- *Students will contribute observations or generate questions during meeting time.
- *Demonstrate appropriate behaviors of Early Learning Standards.
- *Demonstrate safe, kind and gentle behaviors while engaging in outdoor learning and play.
- *Students will be able to read and record the outside temperature using a thermometer.
- *Pre/ post assessment: What will/did we learn in Nature Play? Write a persuasive/opinion piece about why or why not we should have Nature Play in first grade.
- *Teachers will make observations and collect anecdotal information.
- *Conduct "interviews" using ipad for use as a "guided tour" of area for a presentation to parents, school board, community.

Length of Unit (days/periods): Once a week for 2 hours per session.

Timeline: September - June Thursdays 12:30-2:30 3-4 adults/28 first graders

Lesson Plans/Learning Activities to support learning targets:

- *Hike out to Nature Play/Forest Day area (10 minutes)
- *Read and record date and temperature (5 min)
- *Sit spots, Journals (10-20 min)
- *Gather up and share observations- I noticed... (10 min)
- *Nature Play (30 min)
- *Signal to meet, share observations (10 min)

Stations (30 min) students rotate through one station each week for 3 weeks.
Adults teach same station for 3 weeks to 3 different groups.

- ***Literacy:** read aloud, retell, story boards, vocabulary, discussion
- ***Math** (geometry/measurement/graphing/mapping our space)
- ***Science:** (possible themes) plant and tree identification, tracking, weather, birds,

winter animals, phases of matter, nature cycles, spring buds, wildflowers, pollinators,

*Closing Circle, return to school (20 min)

*post photos and text on [ClassDojo for Teachers](#) account

Materials needed:

*loose parts(acorns, cones, sticks, stones, bowls, large spoons, cups, pans...)

*small chalkboards, chalk

*tablecloth or tarp, rope (approx. 20 feet) binoculars, hand lenses, pencils, erasers, clipboards, paper, tree clippers, bug boxes

*extra gloves/mittens and socks

*Read aloud book(s) (ex: 3 Billy Goats Gruff, 3 Little Pigs)

*camera and/or ipad

*First Aid Kit, phone and/or radio to contact school

Supporting resources:

www.forestkinder.org

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=vJQxIRhwbNQ

-Sobel, David- "Not Your Father's School"

High Cairns Film. **The Best Day Ever** Forest Programs in Vermont Kindergartens

www.antioch.edu/bestdayever

www.AcornNaturalists.com

Banning, Wendy. and Sullivan, Ginny. **Lens on Outdoor Learning.**

Information to structure and support outdoor experiences

Early Learning Standards explanation and how each relates to outdoor learning

Bower MacPhee,N. **Adventure, Play, Peace-** Insights and Activities for Social-Emotional

Learning and Community Building With Young Children

Holland, Mary. **Milkweed Visitors**

Leslie, Clare Walker. **Keeping a Nature Journal**

Project Learning Tree-**Growing Up Wild-** Exploring Nature with Young Children

National Association of the Education of Young Children(NAEYC) Curriculum

Selly,Patty Born. **Teaching STEM Outdoors: Activities for Young Children**

Thanks to my Support Team-

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