



Lesson Plan Information

Estimated Duration: 1-2 class periods

Materials: Paper, pencils, clipboard, chart paper, markers, ruler, species identification books (optional)

Key Vocabulary: naturalization, trees, plants, map, biodiversity, green, plan

Setting: Indoors and Outdoors

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Growing Knowledge Outdoors

The benefits of getting kids outdoors are well recognized- it can help foster an environmental ethic, improve wellness, and enhance learning. However when kids spend a large portion of their time at school, how can you ensure that they get that important interaction with the natural world? Outdoor classrooms provide an opportunity for teachers to get their students outdoors, and give them a space to teach a variety of subjects. Greening a schoolyard by adding an outdoor classroom provides a unique, hands-on learning space and significant environmental benefits- such as creating wildlife habitat. Depending on how the area is landscaped and what native species of plants are chosen, you can expect to attract butterflies, invertebrates and even some small mammals! By providing an urban oasis for these plants and animals your naturalized schoolyard can help to safeguard regional and national biodiversity. All those native species of plants in the schoolyard will also help improve air quality, act as efficient carbon dioxide sinks and provide a shaded playing area for hot summer days. Your new improved schoolyard could also prevent excessive runoff during storms as the soil will retain, and slowly release water, preventing sewer systems from becoming overwhelmed.

Other benefits of a green schoolyard include:

- Reduction of Urban Heat Island Effect
- Root systems of trees and plants will help prevent erosion
- Habitat for increased biodiversity
- Space will engage and foster an appreciation of environment in students
- Proper placement of plants and trees can reduce cooling and heating bills (passive solar design)

Outdoor classrooms are often a result of collaborative efforts within the school to design and then implement the ideas. More importantly, the success of the program is dependent on the school community coming together to ensure its sustainability. But you don't need a whole classroom to help encourage your students to get outside and learn about the environment. Even the addition of one tree has valuable benefits for learning and the environment. By encouraging your students to get outside and learn, you are helping to create the green leaders of tomorrow and helping them to become "Treesponsible™".

Activity

Outdoors

- Step 1** Have students form small groups. Give each group a piece of blank paper, pencil and clipboard.
- Step 2** Take a walk with students in your schoolyard or local green space. Ask the students to make notes about where plants and trees are located on the property. Try identifying some of the trees and plants with your students using plant identification books.
- Step 3** Have students draw a map of the schoolyard and draw the areas where plants are currently found, including walking paths and sports fields.
- Step 4** Have a discussion with the students outdoors. Ask them why they think green spaces in the schoolyard and local parks are important. Have students talk about why they want these green spaces.

Indoors

- Step 1** Give the same small groups chart paper and markers.
- Step 2** Using the map they drew outside, ask them to draw this map on the larger piece of paper.
- Step 3** Using a different colour marker, ask students to draw where they would like to see more trees and plants in the yard. Ask them to create the perfect outdoor classroom!
- Step 4** Challenge students by giving them specific goals for their new schoolyard- increase the amount of shade, increase the diversity of habitats, or introduce natural features that can be used for learning.
- Step 5** Have students present their map to the class, explaining why they added the new green spaces.

Extensions

- Challenge students by asking them to research specific species they think would work well in the schoolyard- either because they are native to the area, provide important habitat, or provide interesting learning opportunities.
- Ask your students to create a maintenance plan for the outdoor classroom- how will they ensure that the new green spaces will be cared for?
- Increase the challenge of this exercise by asking students to create the map according to scale. Have students use their pacing (footsteps) to determine the scale of the map.

For more curriculum linked lesson plans and activities, visit www.focusonforests.ca.



Looking for funding to help create an outdoor classroom in your school? Visit TreeCanada.ca or Majesta.com and enter the Trees of Knowledge competition for a chance to WIN* a \$20,000 outdoor classroom.

*For complete details visit www.MAJESTA.com

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