

THE POWER OF THE NATURAL WORLD IN HELPING MENTAL HEALTH



Grades 4-7

The Power of the Natural World in Helping Mental Health Health Education and Science

Purpose of the Lesson:

Nature has been proven to be helpful in supporting overall mental health and wellness. “There is mounting evidence, from dozens and dozens of researchers, that nature has benefits for both physical and psychological human well being,” says Lisa Nisbet, PhD, a psychologist at Trent University in Ontario, Canada ([SOURCE](#)). This lesson explores this idea and provides students the opportunity to track their mood based on how much or little time they spend in the natural world. The closure of this lesson should be used as a time of reflection for students on how nature makes them feel and what they believe the benefits of nature can have on their mental health and wellness.

Curriculum Competencies:

Health and Physical Education

- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being (Grade 4)
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use (Grade 4)
- Describe factors that positively influence mental well-being and self-identity (Grade 4)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 5/6/7)
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others (Grade 5/6/7)

Science

- Demonstrate curiosity about the natural world (Grade 4)
- Observe objects and events in familiar contexts (Grade 4)
- Make observations in familiar or unfamiliar contexts (Grade 5/6)
- Make observations aimed at identifying their own questions about the natural world (Grade 7)
- Identify questions about familiar objects and events that can be investigated scientifically (Grade 4)
- Identify questions to answer or problems to solve through scientific inquiry (Grade 5/6/7)

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Science

- Make predictions based on prior knowledge (Grade 4)
- Make predictions about the findings of their inquiry (Grade 5/6/7)
- Suggest ways to plan and conduct an inquiry to find answers to their questions (Grade 4)
- With support, plan appropriate investigations to answer their questions or solve problems they have identified (Grade 5/6)
- Collaboratively plan a range of investigation types, including field work and experiments, to answer their questions or solve problems they have identified (Grade 7)
- Make observations about living and non-living things in the local environment (Grade 4)
- Collect simple data (Grade 4)
- Experience and interpret the local environment (Grade 4/5/6/7)
- Identify some simple environmental implications of their and others' actions (Grade 4)
- Express and reflect on personal or shared experiences of place (Grade 4)
- Communicate ideas, explanations, and processes in a variety of ways (Grade 5/6/7)
- Express and reflect on personal, shared, or others' experiences of place (Grade 5/6/7)

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Deep understanding of place and connection to the natural world.

Video

[The Hidden Benefits of Nature - Frost Science](#)

Guiding Questions:

- How do you feel when you're in nature?
- Do you find a shift in your mood when you're in the natural world?
- Does being out in nature feel like a mental health break?
- Do you intentionally spend time outside when you're feeling a certain way? Happy or sad?

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Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Preparation: Queue up video/set up projector

1. Have the students watch the video “Mental Health and Nature” This can be found [HERE](#).

2. Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.

3. Begin the lesson by discussing with your students the concept of Ecopsychology.

Inform your students that being out in nature is actually a prescribed mental health therapeutic technique. Discuss with your students the research study highlighted in the video, wherein a researcher in England tracked data from over 20,000 respondents who spent time outside for two hours a week. According to this study, being out in nature has hugely positive impacts on your mind and body, including reducing stress and anxiety.

Start an open dialogue with your class about this study and these positive physical and psychological outcomes.

4. Have your students reflect on how being in nature makes them feel in a Think-Pair-Share.

Get them to discuss experiences they’ve had in nature with a partner. These can be stories of camping experiences, hikes, fishing trips or simply walks around the block. Then get two sets of partners to discuss these experiences with each other. You should encourage students to use this time to really reflect on how nature makes them feel. Discussing these experiences with one another will help inform their predictions for the main science activity of this lesson.

5. Explain the curriculum connections to your students. Inform them that they will be putting this research study to the test and conducting their own experiment about how nature makes them feel. Inform them that, before they begin the experiment, they will make predictions about what they think the outcome will be. These outcomes can be based on the previous experiences in nature they talked about or their general understanding of their mood in relation to nature. Then they will use the template below to track their mood in connection to their time in the natural world. Each week for four weeks, students will be encouraged to spend two hours outside. That time could be spent hiking, reading, playing with friends, etc. After each two hour block of time, they will track their mood. Once the four week period is over, they will assess whether or not they saw a pattern of their mood shifting in correlation with the time they spent outside.

THE POWER OF PAYING KINDNESS FORWARD



Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Prediction:				
Week:	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Mood/other observations:				
Result:				

Accommodations/modifications:

- Students who are visually impaired can use you or a family member as a scribe for their chart
- Students whose first language isn't English can write their notes in their first language and you can help them translate it to English

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Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

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6. Experiment reflection. At the end of the two weeks, have your students share their results with you and the class. This is a great opportunity for deep reflection on this exercise as well as the impact nature can have on your mental and emotional wellbeing. Get your students to think about what exactly it was that caused their mood to shift about being out in nature, if they noticed an improvement.

7. Lesson Closure. Open up a dialogue with your students about this activity and their experiences in the natural world. Once they have completed this experiment, they should have a better understanding of whether or not being outside did, in fact, improve their overall mental wellbeing. Some questions you can ask your students during this discussion:

- What did you notice about your mood during these four weeks?
- Do you feel like being out in nature is something you will bring into a self-care plan?
- Did you feel less connected to technology during your time outside? Did that impact your mood?
- Do you feel like your physical health improved as well?