

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 (Grades 5-7).
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use for others (Grades 5-7).

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 (Grades 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 (Grades 5-7).
- Make predictions based on prior knowledge (Grade 4).
- Make predictions about the findings of their inquiry (Grades 5-7).
- 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 (Grades 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 and collect simple data (Grade 4).
- Experience and interpret the local environment (Grades 4-7).
- Identify simple environmental implications of their and others' actions and express and reflect on personal or shared experiences of place (Grade 4).
Communicate ideas, explanations, and processes in a variety of ways, and express and reflect on personal, shared, or others' experiences of place (Grades 5-7).

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational, with a focus on connectedness, 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.

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Video

ScienceSpotlight: The Hidden Benefits of Nature

Frost Science (2020,March27). *Science spotlight: The hidden benefits of nature* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wehfxjthuMM>

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, whether happy or sad?

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Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Preparation: Queue up the videos, set up the projector, and print the four-week tracking template.

1. Have the students watch the video "Mental Health and Nature." The video is available [here](#).

2. Pause the video and use the guiding questions to spark discussion.

3. Begin the lesson by discussing the concept of ecopsychology. Inform students that spending time in nature is a prescribed mental health therapeutic technique. Discuss the research study highlighted in the video, in which a researcher in England tracked data from more than 20,000 respondents who spent two hours a week outside. According to this study, time in nature has strongly positive effects on the mind and body, including reduced stress and anxiety. Open a class dialogue about the study and these positive physical and psychological outcomes.

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

Ask them to discuss experiences they have had in nature with a partner. These may include camping, hiking, fishing, or simply walking around the block. Then have two sets of partners discuss these experiences together. Encourage students to use this time to reflect on how nature makes them feel. These conversations will help inform their predictions for the main science activity.

5. Explain the curriculum connections and introduce the four-week experiment. Students will put the research study to the test by conducting their own experiment about how nature makes them feel. Before the experiment begins, they will predict the outcome based on their previous experiences in nature or their general understanding of mood and nature. Students will use the tracking template to record their mood in connection with time spent in the natural world. Each week for four weeks, encourage students to spend two hours outside hiking, reading, playing with friends, or doing another outdoor activity. After each two-hour block, they will record their mood. At the end of four weeks, they will assess whether their mood shifted in correlation with time spent outside.

6. Experiment reflection. At the end of the four weeks, have students share their results with the teacher and the class. Use this opportunity for deep reflection on the exercise and on the impact nature can have on mental and emotional well-being. Ask students to consider what caused their mood to shift while they were in nature, if they noticed an improvement.

7. Lesson Closure. Open a dialogue about the activity and students' experiences in the natural world. Once the experiment is complete, students should have a better understanding of whether spending time outside improved their overall mental well-being.

Some questions you can ask during this discussion:

- What did you notice about your mood during these four weeks?
- Do you feel that spending time 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 affect your mood?
- Do you feel that your physical health improved as well?

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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 the teacher or a family member as a scribe for their chart. Students whose first language is not English can write notes in their first language and work with the teacher to translate them into English.