Outdoor learning – tree-riific poems

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Nature and poetry go hand-in-hand. Many famous poets were inspired by nature, including William Blake, Oscar Wilde, Geoffrey Chaucer and John Keats. Poetry encourages the use of creative expression and descriptive language.

This activity teaches students about using objectives to help their minds imagine the scene being portrayed in a poem. This activity also allows students to reflect on the benefits of being outdoors while learning the outcomes of the Australian Curriculum.

Time required: 90 minutes

Learning goal: Students understand the value and importance of trees to humans and our environment. They recognize how they can use their senses to experience trees, and understand how to convey these experiences into poetry. They recognize how poetry can convey people’s experiences about the importance of trees.

Essential questions: Why are trees important? Why is it important to receive feedback about artwork? How can you give feedback to others in a truthful but kind manner? How can you use feedback to improve the quality of your artwork?

Curriculum links: Year 5 & 6 English

General capabilities: Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking.
Cross-curriculum priority: Sustainability (CL)

Resources required:
Seven large pieces of cardboard, each labelled with one of the following: Sight, Sound, Touch, Tasteful, Smell, Thinking, Feeling/Emotion.
Seven whiteboards or blackboards.
The book Planting the Tree of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai by Claire A. Nivola. Student Workout paper or online copy. Free to access from Cool Australia’s website.

Digital technology opportunities: QR codes, digital sharing capabilities

Lesson sequence:
Part I. Story and Race thinking routine – 25 minutes
Part II. Poetry Writing, Editing and Sharing – 25 minutes
Part III. Reflection – 10 minutes

PART I. STORY and RACE THINKING ROUTINE

Step 1. If you aren’t already outside, take your class to your outdoor learning space. Review outdoor learning rules and the benefits of outdoor learning with students, including potential hazards and actions to take in the event of hazards.

Step 2. As a class, read the poem “The Tree of Kenya” by Wangari Maathai, then choose one student to read the poem out loud.

Step 3. To help concretise student thinking, engage students in a class discussion using the following questions: What’s the most important reason we have trees? Why is this the most important reason?

Step 4. Invite students to participate in the Roko thinking routine on the Student Worksheet. This requires students to use their senses to observe the nature around them.

In this activity, students are asked to observe how they experience trees by arranging the following questions: What do trees feel like? What do trees smell like? What might tree leaves feel like? What might tree leaves look like? What might tree leaves sound like? How does being around trees make you feel? What does being around trees make you think about?

Step 5. While students are completing the Roko thinking routine, prepare for the next activity by setting out the seven pieces of paper or cardboard labelled with one of the following: Sight, Sound, Touch, Tasteful, Smell, Thinking, Feeling/Emotion with markers/whiteboards in the learning space from a large circle.

Step 6. Working in seven groups, invite students to share some of their responses to the questions above, adding ideas to the relevant written cards spread around the learning space. Encourage students to be creative in thinking about what words can be added to the cards. Give groups 2-3 minutes at each card. As students rotate through the activity, you could reduce the amount of time they spend at each card, as it may become increasingly difficult to think of new ideas. Monitor student attention and behaviour, and裥e the time at each circle, if necessary.

PART II. POETRY WRITING, EDITING AND SHARING

Step 1. Recreate the class and explain that they will use the words on these seven cards to write a poem about trees, and that they will get to decide how to use the poem to help other people realize the importance and value of trees.

Before beginning, engage students in a discussion about the words and phrases written on the cards. Ensure students are familiar with them, how they are used and how they apply to the topic.

Step 2. Revise the concept of adjectives and encourage students to use them in their poem. For reassurance, you could teach the top five.

Step 3. Explain that students will write their own poem, using one short descriptive sentence for each of the seven cards.

Step 4. Place the pieces of cardboard back into the large circle formation so that students can use the brainstormed ideas to write their own poems. Ask students to sit at the pieces of cardboard again. Explain that the lines of the poem don’t have to be written in order. Encourage students to move to different circles in their own time. Emphasize that their poems need to reinforce the importance of trees. Students can write their poems in the spaces provided on the Student Worksheet.

Step 5. At the end of the writing time, ask students to whip up their poems about the idea of a tree in nature and mark them with one grade. Give students an opportunity to share their poems with the whole class.

WORD RAP

A noun is a person, place or thing. Like boy, house or playground swing.
An adjective describes something: tall, flat, blue or beautiful sky.
A verb is an action or being kind of thing: fall, run, walk, be, about and sing!

Step 3. As a class, create some examples based on student ideas. For example: branch – strong branch; wind – force wind; etc. Load students to the question: What effect do adjectives have on the reader? (Examples answer: To help the reader create an image in their mind).

For more information and download the full activity: www.coolaustralia.org/activity/educational-learning-resource/6300300120. Cool Australia would like to thank The Youngman Trust – managed by Equity Trusts.