

Art in the Andrews

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Adapted from: Poet-tree activity in Project Learning Tree

American Forest Foundation. Project Learning Tree: Environmental Education PreK-8 Activity Guide. 2006

Time: 35 minutes

Overview

This activity allows participants to closely observe the forest and then express their observations, thoughts, values, and beliefs about the forest through drawing and/or writing. Students will read samples of nature writing done in the Andrews and will then create their own writings or drawings to communicate their experience in the forest.

Benchmarks Addressed

E.07.2.A.1(1) and (2) Skill to Support the Standard

E.07.3.H.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) Personal Narrative, Fictional Narrative, Persuasive, and Expository writing

Modes

E.08.2.A.1(1) and (2) Skill to Support the Standard

E.08.3.H.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) Personal Narrative, Fictional Narrative, Expository, and Persuasive

This activity develops students' writing and listening skills while on the forest field trip. It gets the students to observe the forest closely and make observations, which they then turn into a piece of writing or drawing. It allows students to express/ explore their creativity while they learn about the forest.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Express their personal experience in the forest through writing and drawing.
2. Recognize that combining science and art can enhance our understanding of the forest by providing close, non-scientific observation and reflection.

Materials Needed

- Paper ("Write in the Rain" paper is the best option if it is raining)
- Pens/pencils

Background Material

The Long-Term Ecological Reflections project at HJ Andrews is, in the words of the organizers, designed to "bring together the practical wisdom of the

environmental sciences, the clarity of philosophical analysis, and the creative, expressive power of the written world [in order to] find new ways to understand and re-imagine our relation to the natural world.” This activity gives students a chance to create their own poetry to express their experiences in the forest in a creative way.

Students will be more likely to participate in this activity if they find an artistic medium that fits them. Therefore, it is best to provide students with as many options as possible. Students may draw, free-write, or write poetry to express their experience in the forest. For students that struggle with creative expression, it may help to provide a structure. These students may choose to do a haiku poem, which is a Japanese form of poetry with three lines. The first has five syllables, the second has seven, and the third line has five.

Activity Description

Getting Started: Introductions (5 minutes)

Introduction: Begin by asking students whether any of them don't like science. Explain that, although the Andrews is a premier site for scientific research, the researchers also realize the importance of incorporating art into their study of the forest. Combining science and art helps bring together insights from many different people with many perspectives and can yield a better overall understanding of the forest. With this goal in mind, the HJ Andrews invites two writers per year to stay at the Andrews for a week and reflect on the forest. These writers then use their thoughts and observations while in the forest to compose prose and poetry inspired by the Andrews forest.

Today we are going to read a sample of nature writing done by writers-in-residence in the HJ Andrews forest. Then we are going to carefully observe the forest and use all of our senses to discover the characteristics that inspire, disgust, and intrigue us. We will use our thoughts from the observation time to compose writings and drawings that reflect our experience in the forest.

Nature writing samples and quiet observations (5 minutes)

(The first two steps can be done in the classroom or on the nature trail at the Long-Term Ecological Reflections post. The rest of the activity should be done on the trail).

1. Read or have volunteers read the sample of nature prose composed by Scott Slovic, a writer in residence from the Andrews. Ask students for comments on the poem. Have they had similar experiences in the forest? (5 minutes)
2. Ask students questions to introduce them to poetry forms such as Haiku, diamante, and free form.

Q. *Who knows what a haiku is?*

A. A Japanese form of poetry composed of three lines. The first line has 5 syllables, the second line has 7, and the third line has 5.

Q. *Who knows what free form poetry is?*

A. Poetry that is not restricted by a format. (5 minutes)

Observations and Writing/Drawing (23 Minutes)

1. Have students spread out along the trail. Make sure that each student is alone and not talking with others. Have the students sit quietly for a few minutes while they write descriptive words about how the trees and the forest smell, look, feel, etc. They can also record any thoughts that they have during this time. Then have students write or draw about their experience in the forest. They can try multiple forms of artistic expression to determine which one they like best. (10 minutes)
2. Have the students share their work with the group. If the group is large or shy, you may want to have students break up into groups of 4 to share. (5 minutes)
3. Discuss some of the following questions with the students, pointing out that people see trees and forests differently. (8 minutes)

Did anyone's writing or drawing include some of the scientific information that you learned in the Andrews or in class?

-This is a good place to point out that some people view the forest more scientifically than others

Do you think the close observation and writing you've done in this activity will influence how you look at/ think about the forest?

-Help students understand that the scientific information and close observation/ artistic expression can both combine to shape their view of the forest.

Gauging Understanding and Wrapping Up (2 minutes)

Discuss the activity with the students. Did the observation period and the writing/drawing allow the students to see the forest differently than scientific study alone could have done? (2 minutes)

Additional Reading/Resources

All the writings from the Long Term Ecological Reflections Project are available at:

<http://www.fsl.orst.edu/lter/research/related/writers/template.cfm?next=wir&topnav=169>

A Writing Excerpt from an H.J. Andrews writer-in-residence

Out of Time by Scott Slovic

Eventually the physical process of straining uphill on the narrow trail had its desired effect. I stopped thinking so much—stopped thinking about thinking—and started simply breathing. I tried to figure out what I heard as I

walked—the gurgles of rainwater, the occasional whooshing of steep streams, distant

caws and cackles of birds, and my own breathing—in and out, in and out.

I recalled Richard Nelson's notion that when you're in a place, you bring the place into you by drinking its water, eating what lives there, and breathing in its air. I

concentrated on breathing this forest into myself as I hiked.

As I walked through the old growth forest—ancient living trees, giant snags still

standing, deadfall everywhere in the process of fertilizing decay—I found myself more

fascinated with my own meager breaths. Nothing momentous about a single tiny person

walking and breathing in the woods. But the rhythm of my breathing had, for the moment, joined the other rhythms of this forest—the rhythms of water and air, of movement and stillness, of living and dying. This felt good to me.