

Descanso Gardens

Grade Levels:

Kindergarten and up

Duration:

5-10 minutes to introduce the activity and find places (first time only)

10-20 minutes for activity

5 minutes to share out at the end

Materials:

- Journals or notebooks
- Pencils & colored pencils
- Pencil sharpeners and erasers
- Magnifying glasses
- Thermometer to record weather (optional)

NGSS Tie-Ins:

Science and Engineering:

Asking questions

Analyzing and interpreting data

Engaging in argument from evidence

Obtaining, evaluating, & communicating information

Cross-cutting Concepts:

Patterns

Cause and effect

System and system models

VAPA Tie-Ins:

Aesthetic perception

Creative expression

Connections, relationships, applications

Place in the World

Overview

In this nature study, students will have the opportunity to choose a special spot in their outdoor space to observe on a regular basis. They will record observations, questions, and artwork in nature journals.

This activity can be done anytime in any variation of outdoor space—a patch of grass, a few trees, or a flowerbed is all you need.

Learning Objectives

- Students will strengthen scientific observation skills by looking and listening closely.
- Students will practice writing skills by describing their observations in the form of a journal entry, prose, or poetry.
- Students will practice life drawing skills and express themselves through art.
- Students will cultivate a sense of ownership of their space and stewardship of the natural world.

Activity

- Introduce the activity to your students. *“Each of you is going to find a place in our [garden, playground, yard, etc.] to quietly observe and reflect on what is around you. This will be your spot for the whole [week, month, school year]. We are going to spend 3 minutes finding a spot, you are going to observe your surroundings for 15 minutes, then we will spend 5 minutes sharing with the group. Look and listen closely (touch plants gently if allowed) and draw and write about what you notice. Each time you return to your place, take notes about what has changed.”*

- Students can consider the following prompts as a framework for their nature study:

“I notice...I wonder...it reminds me of...”

- Give parameters for where students can search for a place. On the first day, ask them what a good place in the world should have (shade/sun, comfortable spot on the ground to sit, something to observe, room to spread out a bit). Remind them that this is going to be their place for quite awhile so they should spend a few minutes finding a place they really like. Ensure that each student is finding their own place and that they're not too close to one another.
- As everyone settles into their places, continue reminding students that this a no-talking, reflective activity. *“If we're talking we won't be able to notice all the interesting things happening around us!”*
- Give students 5/3/2 minute warnings that the activity is ending. Use a bell, clap, or your favorite attention-getter to let students know it's time to gather and share.
- Ask who would like to share their observations. After the first time, start asking students what changes they noticed or what stayed the same.

Activity Tips

- This activity works best if it becomes a regular part of your daily or weekly routine. Utilize it as a start and/or end to students' day or as a transitional activity.
- Store nature journals or notebooks and other supplies somewhere students can easily access them when it's time for the activity. Getting and putting supplies away becomes part of the routine.
- Remind students to write down the date, time, and even the weather so they can easily track the changes that happen in their place.
- Options for 5th grade and up:
 - ◇ Lengthen the time to 20-30 minutes.
 - ◇ Integrate the activity into a larger journaling project or use observations as data for a research project.
 - ◇ Have students focus on one plant in their place (ex. If you are studying trees, each student would choose 1 tree to observe).

My Place in the World

Name: _____ Date: _____

Explore our outdoor space find a spot you would like to explore and observe. This is your Place in the World. Use your senses to make close observations about your surroundings, and record them in the space below. You can use the following prompts to get started:

“I notice....I wonder....It reminds me of...”

