



EVERGREEN

# Teacher's Corner Lesson Plans

*Helping Teachers and Students Make the Most of  
their Outdoor Classroom*

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## Nurturing Inquiry: School Ground Observations\*†

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Grade level: 4

Provincial curriculum links: Ontario

Subject: Science and Technology

Keywords: observations, questions, habitats, community

### Description

An important building block in the inquiry process is close observation and the questions it generates. In this activity, students act as scientists in research teams to explore different school ground habitats. Students practice outdoor group work skills.

### Curriculum Framework

Topic: Life Systems

Strand: Habitats and Communities

Specific Lesson Goals:

- Classify plants and animals that they have observed in local habitats according to similarities and differences (i.e. location)
- Formulate questions about and identify the needs of animals and plants in a particular habitat

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\* This exercise is adapted from *Teaching in the Outdoor Classroom*, Evergreen/TDSB Summer Institute, 2007, 82 pages.

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## Preparation

Preparation Time:

- 15-20 minutes to sketch map of the school ground and choose 5 areas/habitats

Length of lesson:

- 40 minutes

Resources required:

- 5 copies of teacher drawn map of the school ground identifying 5 different areas of study
- pencil (1 per student)
- clipboard (1 per student)
- whiteboard and whiteboard marker (optional)

## Procedure

1. Inside the classroom, place students into 5 different groups. Show students the map of the school ground with 5 different areas/habitats highlighted and arrows showing the direction in which groups will rotate.
2. Review the attached data sheet and explain that you will work through an example as a class outside.
3. Review the Outdoor Classroom rules and reinforce the importance of working collaboratively in groups. It is helpful to incorporate a classroom management system for the outdoor classroom and track individual and group behaviour.
4. Walk the class outside in a line to the first location. Have class remain sitting while you stand and model observations. Record observations in point form on the white board (or on your own data sheet). Emphasize that students should use all their senses and look both up and down.
  - a. Possible recordings are: moist grass, rough bark on maple tree, dry grass, 8 dandelions, bird nest in tree, blue sky above bright sun, some shade, ants in the grass, litter on the ground, etc.)
5. Groups are then assigned to an area of the school ground to make their own observations. From their observations, students may arrive at some questions about the specific habitat they are exploring (i.e. Why is the grass dry in this section and moist in another section? What made the holes in the tree?).
6. Give groups 5 to 10 minutes to explore 3 areas of the school ground. An additional copy of the "School Ground Observations" sheet can be made if you elect to have students visit all 5 (or more) of the school ground 'habitats'.

## Discussion and Questions

- Once back in the classroom, record their collective observations and discuss any interesting findings. Make a list on chart paper of the habitats and communities that were discovered on the school ground. This can be added to as investigations ensue.
- Start a chart paper with Inquiry Questions. After having explored at least two areas/habitats, students may be able to formulate comparative questions (i.e. Why are there more dandelions in the north east corner of the school ground than in the south east corner?).

## Student Assessment and Evaluation

Collect this sheet to assess the quality of their observations and questions. This can also be placed in an inquiry portfolio to compare the quantity and quality of their observations/questions as they become more proficient with the eco-inquiry approach.

## Enrichment and Extension Activities

- Students may already have questions in the form of a simple hypothesis that can be recorded and kept on chart paper.
- If groups only rotated to 2 locations, the lesson can be repeated to record more observations and questions.

## Educator Notes

This is an extension of the “Student as Scientists” lesson. Although the lesson may not appear to be very exciting, you will be surprised at the level of student engagement in this simple outdoor activity. They will want to spend an extensive amount of time in a very small area as they look at their school ground through new eyes.