



Tool 2.4

Giving nature time

CLARITY Competence Area:

Nurturing connection to oneself, others and nature

GreenComp Competence Area:

Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

Why use this tool?

The "Give Nature Time" tool is designed to encourage individuals and groups to deepen their connection with the natural world through immersive and mindful experiences. This tool is an invitation to slow down, reconnect, and appreciate the profound impact that nature can have on our lives. By integrating activities like "Nature Adventures," participants engage in unstructured outdoor play, reflection, and exploration, allowing them to experience the myriad benefits of nature firsthand.

Activity 2.4.5

Nature-based art

Overview

This activity focuses on using natural material and landscapes as mediums for artistic expression, connecting people with the environment through creative endeavors. Examples of nature-based art include creating a nature-based mandala, or a clay face on a tree. Creating a mandala made of collected twigs, stones, flowers and leaves helps develop a contemplative relationship with nature, while helping foster collaboration. It is also meant to be transient/temporary and helps reflect on our relationship to time, including the cyclical nature of life. Creating clay faces on trees can help introduce the topic of communication between plants, as well as reflections on animism.

Curriculum linkage

Arts and Natural Science

Competences built

Systems thinking, interconnectedness thinking, empathy

Prep

Learn more about land art, and/or mandalas.

Steps in the activity

1. Harvest
2. Creation
3. Reflection



BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

45-60 minutes

Group size:

Flexible

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

It depends on the artform you choose

Location:

Outdoors

Engagement of external stakeholders:

Not necessarily. A local land artist would be an asset.



Step 1: Harvest

1. Bring the learners to a place in nature where they are allowed to gather natural material and have space to create sculptures, assemblages and installations.
2. Allow the learners to explore the space and take note of possible material for their art, as well as of locations where they could create together. The material for their artworks should primarily be fallen leaves, twigs, or flowers that are no longer growing, as well as small stones and other minerals that can easily be displaced and brought back to where they were. Harvesting material should not damage the local ecosystem.
3. Create small groups of 5-6 learners and give them some time to gather material for their nature-based art either individually or as a group.

Step 2: Creation

1. Invite the learners to create an ephemeral artwork out of the material they have gathered. The learners could be invited to create a mandala out of the natural material gathered. They could also be given a prompt or an assignment focusing on their representation of the ecological crisis and/or of a regenerative future.

Step 3: Reflection

1. Once the artworks are finalized, invite learners to have a look at the artworks of the other learners. This can be a good opportunity to reflect on the materials gathered and used by the learners (e.g.



Learners creating and giving shape to a tree face with natural clay.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.



Learners collaborating to design and build their own piece of land art.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.



2. which species were used, which role does that species play in the ecosystem), and to introduce learners to the different plant species present in their environment.
3. Invite learners to share what they wished to represent and how engaging in this activity collectively felt for them. You can also invite learners to reflect on the new perspectives they may have gained in relation to the ecological crisis and/or to regeneration. You may also reflect on the mandala-making practice, if this was the practice you chose, to highlight what actual mandala-making entails in the Buddhist tradition. This will help foster a sense of humility with regard to their creations.
4. Once the activity has been carried out, invite learners to dismantle their artworks and bring the material back to where they grabbed it. This can be an opportunity to highlight the role of healthy soil, fed by organic material, in the health of the local ecosystem.



Learners sharing their nature-based mandala with their peers.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.



Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Look for the location carefully
- Consider this activity at the end of the summer or in the fall, so as to take advantage of the variety of leaves and fallen fruits available.

Don't:

- Don't damage plants while doing the exercise
- Don't choose a very small location where the presence of a large number of learners could damage the plants growing in the soil.

Adaptations:

If some learners are not comfortable being outdoors and picking up leaves or other plants, encourage them to gather material together, rather than individually.

If a learner cannot easily move in the space or pick up material, assign a small group to work with them and get them the material they would like to have access to.

This activity can be carried out regularly to help foster wellbeing in children and youth, and can complement all activities undertaken under competence area 1 "Taking care of climate emotions and trauma".



We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how you want to be treated, but how they want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

Resources

Some pictures of nature-based mandalas:

- <https://www.discoveringanew.com/blog-4/nature-mandalas-nature-activity-for-kids>

Artists using natural material for art:

- <https://www.shonawilson.com/artwork/2011/>
- <https://andygoldsworthystudio.com/archive/>

References

The Mandala Project: <https://www.mandalaproject.org/index.html>

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Wong, W., Zhang, D., Hu, J., & U, C. (2024). Improving emotional and social development in preschool children: Exploring the effects of Mindfulness-Based Mandala intervention in social Work practice in Macao. *Child & Family Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13223>



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