



Tool 2.3

Connecting with the animal

CLARITY Competence Area:

Nurturing connection to oneself, others and nature

GreenComp Competence Area:

Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

Why use this tool?

This tool can help explore animal behaviors, needs and habitats, while reflecting on coexistence. By connecting with the animal, we can better observe, reflect upon and empathize with other species, as well as reconnect with our own nature as animals. Friendly laughter, harmless exploration and fun is encouraged, as we learn and retain knowledge more effectively when we are enjoying ourselves.

Activity 2.3.1

Observe and research animals

Overview

How do animals relate to one another and to their environment? What do we have in common with other animals, and how are we different? What examples can we find of our common ancestry with animals, and of our different adaptations? Explore these questions through observation, reflections and movement exercises. Suggested 'Questions for reflection' and various examples are included to encourage learners to consider ways of living that sustains all forms of life. Friendly laughter, harmless exploration and fun is encouraged! We learn and remember more easily when we are having fun. Access to animals for this tool can be as simple as visiting a town square to observe pigeons. The exercises provided do not require the observer to be close to any animal.

Curriculum linkage

Natural Science, Civics & Social Studies and Cross-Curricular & Global Competencies.

Competences built

Critical thinking, systems thinking, interconnectedness thinking, empathy, presence and nature connectedness.

BASIC INFO



Age range:

6+ (adapt reflection questions to group level)

Duration:

45 minutes + 45 minutes, or more for the optional activity

Group size:

Flexible

Level of difficulty:

Intermediate

Materials required:

Animals to observe, for example birds, sheep, beetles or lizards

Space required:

Quiet enough for conversations, large enough for movement exercises

Location:

Wherever you find animals, for example near a lake, park, town square, farm or zoo. Some of the activity also takes place indoors

Engagement of external stakeholders:

Optional for step 4



Prep Work

Familiarize yourself with suggested questions for reflections.

Steps in the activity

1. Find, choose and observe
2. Describe and try out movements
3. Questions and reflections

Step 1: Find, choose and observe a species/ group of animals

1. Take your learners to an area where you know animals can be found.
2. Choose a species together with your learners. Based on what you think is best for your class, you can either have the whole group choose a species, or divide them into smaller groups, with each group selecting a species to observe.
3. Allow everyone to observe the chosen animals for a few minutes.

Step 2: Describing the animals' movements and trying them out

1. Ask the learners to describe the movements of the chosen animals.
2. Then, learners mimic these movements with their own bodies.
3. Optional: Reflect together on the experience, either during or after the activity. You can ask the following questions: What movements feel easy for you? Which ones feel difficult or even impossible?
4. Invite learners to consider which aspects of the animal's environment may have influenced the evolution of their movements? (For example, running quickly to escape predators, or reaching high into trees for food.)

Step 3: Questions and reflections based on the observations

1. Encourage learners to discuss and reflect on the **similarities** and **differences** between humans and the chosen animal. Use the questions below as inspiration, or use your own and your learners'. Feel free to divide the class into smaller groups to facilitate more meaningful conversations. In order to reflect on similarities and differences between humans and the chosen animal, you can ask learners to reflect on the following questions:
 - a. How many legs does the animal have?



- b. Where are their eyes?
 - c. Can they live or go underwater?
 - d. Do they have bones? What does their skeleton look like?
 - e. Do they live in groups or on their own? Do they have friends?
 - f. Do they slow down when the weather is cold?
 - g. What does their shelter look like?
 - h. What are they scared of?
 - i. Do they experience or think about climate change?
2. Invite learners to imagine how animals see the world and/or communicate with each other?

Step 4: Connecting reflections and imagination with research and facts

1. Invite learners to research their chosen animal, looking into the assumptions and imaginings expressed during Step 2. Research can be done online or in books, and can be complemented by a short lecture or a conversation with an expert.
2. Invite learners to compare findings from their research with the assumptions and imaginings expressed during Step 2. Encourage learners to share what they learnt and what surprised them.
3. Invite learners to represent with a drawing or a collage how their chosen animal communicates and/or sees the world. Some inspiration can be drawn from the work of [Marshmallow Laser Feast](#), and their immersive experience titled "[In the eyes of the animal](#)".

(Optional) Step 5: Expand this research to other animals

1. Invite learners to gather information about the species they chose, focusing on:
 - a. How does this species experience the world through their senses?
 - b. How does this species communicate, and maybe even collaborate?
2. Encourage learners to carry out research through direct observation (where applicable), watching videos, researching online or in books, or asking an expert.
3. Invite learners to present their research in any creative way they want, acknowledging practical limitations. Ideas for such creative presentations include:
 - a. A short play or improv theatre to be presented in class
 - b. Photographs, paintings, drawings, comics or multi-media artwork



- c. Texts, for example poems, short stories or essays
 - d. A short presentation with a slideshow
 - e. Physical models
 - f. A collection of descriptive AI-generated images, based on text prompts the learners provided, provided that all are aware of the ethical implications of this practice.
4. Invite learners to reflect on each other's presentation.



Dos and don'ts

Don't:

Don't force any learner to do movements they don't want to do, or to speak out loud to the whole group. Focus instead on making the setting and space feel as safe, encouraging and interesting as possible for the learners.

Adaptations:

You can combine the activity with a visit to for example a zoo, and coordinate your choice of species with the zookeepers. You can then do steps 1-3, and for step 4 you can ask the zookeeper to give the group a short presentation about the species you chose.

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.

References

This activity was designed by Climate Creativity.

- Schönfelder, M. L., & Bogner, F. X. (2017). Two ways of acquiring environmental knowledge: by encountering living animals at a beehive and by observing bees via digital tools. *International Journal of Science Education*, 39(6), 723–741. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09500693.2017.1304670>
- Marshmallow Laser Feast. (2024, August 1). In the Eyes of the Animal — Marshmallow Laser Feast. <https://marshmallowlaserfeast.com/project/in-the-eyes-of-the-animal/>

Numerous meta-analytic reviews show that mind-body practices are effective in promoting motor, cognitive and affective functioning of both healthy and clinical populations. See for example:



- Han, Y. M. Y., Chan, M. M. Y., Choi, C. X. T., Law, M. C. H., Ahorsu, D. K., & Tsang, H. W. H. (2023). The neurobiological effects of mind–body exercise: a systematic review and meta-analysis of neuroimaging studies. *Scientific Reports*, 13(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-37309-4>
- Mualem, R., Leisman, G., Zbedat, Y., Ganem, S., Mualem, O., Amaria, M., Kozle, A., Khayat-Moughrabi, S., & Ornai, A. (2018). The effect of movement on cognitive performance. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 6.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00100>



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Activity 2.3.2

Move and feel like an animal

Overview

Explore emotions and perspectives through moving like different animals. Humans have been imitating animals for thousands of years for many different reasons. This includes to understand the animal they are hunting and its behaviors, to honor another animal, to appease their gods and for entertainment. In this activity we will use imitation to spark empathy and curiosity regarding animals. How do animals move? How do they express their emotions through movement? More particularly, how do they express stress, fear, joy, contentment or affection? Movements will also help learners connect to themselves.

Curriculum linkage

Physical Education & Health and Civics & Social Studies.

Competences built

Emotional literacy and regulation, interconnectedness thinking, empathy, presence, compassion, nature connectedness.

Prep Work

Bring blankets, familiarize yourself with the steps listed below.

Steps in the activity

1. Musical chairs
2. Inventing nature movements
3. Telling a story together with the movements
4. Breathing like the more than human
5. Embodying an animal and an emotion



BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

45-90 minutes

Group size:

Up to ca 20

Level of difficulty:

Intermediate

Materials/space required:

A mat or a blanket for each person for sitting/laying on the ground.
Notepad and a pen for the teacher.

Location:

Preferably outdoors in nature

Engagement of external stakeholders:

No



Tip: Feel free to choose the order of the steps of this activity based on the level of energy in your class. For instance, you can start with Step 1 (Musical chairs) to bring the level of energy up, or with Step 4 (Breathing like nature) to help learners relax.

Step 1: Musical chairs - with blankets/mats

This step is included in the activity to energize the group and get them excited about movement. You can use the learner's experiences to reflect on how climate change shrinks habitats for many different species.

1. Lay out blankets on the ground, around half as many blankets as there are learners.
2. Ask the learners to move around the blankets, they can choose big or almost invisible movements, fast runs or slow crawls, or anything in between. Tell them that as soon as you stop the music, the learners must find a blanket to stand on.
3. Stop the music, let everyone find a blanket to stand on. Multiple learners can stand on one blanket.
4. Now, to increase the difficulty, remove one or more blanket(s). Then start the music again and have the learners leave the blankets to move around them again. The difficulty will increase as the process is repeated, and more and more blankets are removed.
5. End the game when the learners can barely fit on the few blankets that are left. There are no individual "losers" in this game, and everyone experiences the shrinking availability of blanket space.
6. Optional, for older learners: Reflect on the game. Ask the learners if they can think of any animals who are losing habitat/cover because of climate change. See some examples below:
 - a. The polar bear is struggling because of decreasing sea ice cover
 - b. The hare is struggling due to decreasing snow cover (making it more visible in winter)
 - c. Animals living in the mountains are struggling as they experience increased competition as other species move upwards with warming temperatures (ex. the arctic fox)



Step 2: Inventing nature movements

1. Give the learners (single or in groups of 2-3) 5 minutes to invent a short movement inspired by an animal. For example: flapping their arms like a butterfly or stomping the ground like an elephant. Tell the learners that the movement should be short (e.g. 3 moves), something they can remember and show to the whole class.
2. Invite each smaller group to show the whole class the movement they invented, followed by the whole class repeating that movement. This can be done with learners forming a large circle.

Step 3: Telling a story together with the movements

1. Introduce the next step of the activity, during which learners will use the movements inspired by animals to build a short story. Highlight that fun and movement exploration are more important for this story than the coherence of the story.
2. Start the story by saying "Once upon a time ..."
3. Going around the room, ask the learners to repeat their movements and add words to those movements. For example, a learner/group whose movement was waving their arms like a butterfly, might say "... there was a butterfly ...". The next group who was moving like an elephant may say " ... who met an angry elephant ... " etc.
4. Note down the story as it is told, and help learners craft the story with friendly follow-up questions if anyone is struggling.
5. When the story has been told and written, read the story out loud while each learner/group does the corresponding movements.

Step 4: Breathing like the more-than-human

1. Invite learners to sit in a circle, including on the floor if possible.
2. Take a few minutes to guide the learners in trying to breathe in the rhythm of various elements of nature, for example: waves, wind, hummingbird wings, blue whales.



3. Optional: Use the natural sounds in your surroundings as inspiration. Sitting near a lake or the ocean can for example inspire the learners to breathe like the waves. You can also use recordings of nature sounds (waves, wind etc) to support the learners.
4. Allow time for the exercise and welcome any reflections on the experience.

Step 5: Embodying an animal and an emotion

1. Ask learners to reflect upon and then tell which animal they each want to be.
2. Announce the animal you wish to be as well.
3. Ask everyone to strike a pose as that animal would. For example, a t-rex would be standing with its short front legs dangling, a squirrel would squat, or a crocodile would lie flat on the ground.
4. Ask the learners to name an emotion, and to move around as if their chosen animal was feeling that emotion.
5. Ask learners to now express a few different emotions.
6. End the activity by welcoming any reactions or reflections and sharing some of your own.



Dos and don'ts

Do:

Observe your learners closely during the exercises. If any learner suddenly seems uncomfortable with any of the steps, for example from having to stand too close to other learners as their "habitat" shrinks, you can choose that as a good time to end the exercise and go to the next step or a break or round of reflections.

Adaptations:

For learners who can't easily move around on blankets or grass: Skip blankets entirely, and instead draw circles on the ground/floor of your environment that the learners have to stand inside. When it's time to "reduce the habitat" for the learners, instead of removing blankets, you can cross out more and more circles.

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.



References

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- Mualem, R., Leisman, G., Zbedat, Y., Ganem, S., Mualem, O., Amaria, M., Kozle, A., Khayat-Moughrabi, S., & Ornai, A. (2018). The effect of movement on cognitive performance. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00100>



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Activity 2.3.3

Walk and talk with animals

Overview

How can we be authentic while communicating and establishing trust together with another animal? This activity is designed for 1-2 learners per animal, and requires friendly, safe and ethically trained animals (for example dogs, horses or sheep). Meet the animal with compassion and invite them to follow you around an obstacle course of relevant tasks and puzzles. The learners engage with the animal while growing skills associated with collaboration and connectedness. Solving the tasks requires the learners to find a common language with the animal.

Curriculum linkage

Physical Education & Health, Civics & Social Studies, Ethics and Religion & Philosophy.

Your choice of tasks along the path can also introduce any other desired subject or discipline.

Competences built

Empathy, interconnectedness thinking, presence, authenticity, compassion and emotional literacy and regulation.

Prep Work

Coordinate with the animals' owners beforehand about which animals will be involved and what handling routines need to be followed by the learners (concerning giving treats, petting, etc.).

Prepare the tasks along the obstacle course.



BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

45 minutes

Group size:

1-2 learners per animal. Ideally max 10-15 learners active at a time, to best maintain safety around the animals

Level of difficulty:

Intermediate

Materials/space required:

Friendly, safe and ethically trained animals (for example dogs, horses or sheep). Treats for the animals as positive reinforcement (check with the animal owner what sort of treats are suitable).

Location:

Outdoors

Engagement of external stakeholders:

The owners of the animals involved. The animals.



Steps in the activity

1. Conversation and ground rules
2. Grounding exercise - to find calm before greeting the animals
3. Meet and greet the animal
4. The obstacle course
Reflections

Step 1: Conversation and ground rules

Learners are often excited and sometimes scared when they are about to meet an animal. We recommend starting off with a conversation and a grounding exercise to find calm and focus before introducing the animals.

1. Before introducing the animals, have a conversation with the learners about how they think the animals will want to be treated, about what motivates the animals, and about friendly ways to interact with them.
2. Teach the learners if and when to give the animals treats as part of communication.

Step 2: Grounding exercise - to find calm before greeting the animals

Guide the learners in a grounding exercise by inviting the learners to follow the steps below:

1. Put your feet steadily on the ground and keep your eyes open.
2. Sway forward and backward as much as you can.
3. Slowly sway less and less, until the swaying is so small it is no longer visible to anyone.
4. While swaying, observe your breathing. You don't have to change anything or breathe in any particular way, just observe.



Learners greeting a horse, inviting the horse to voluntarily come over to them.

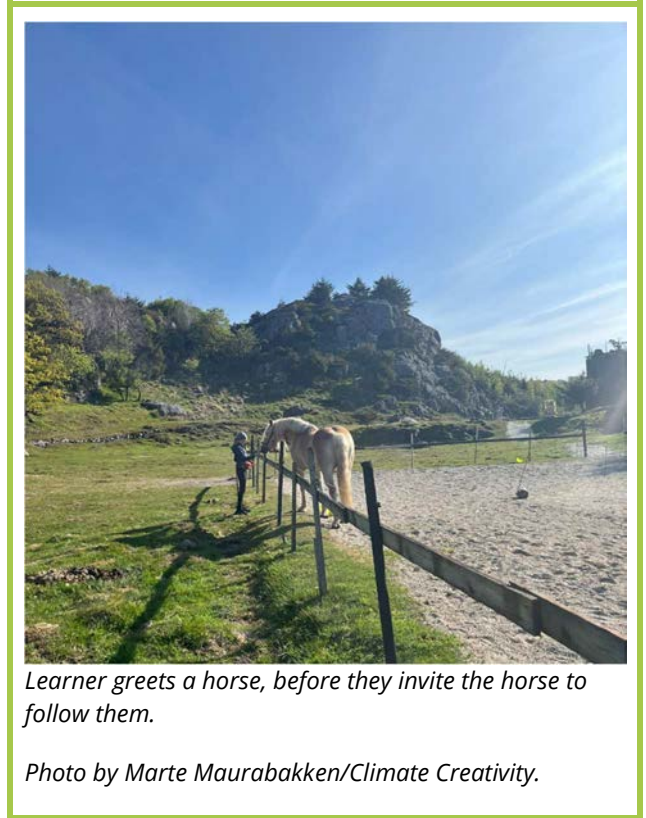
Photo by Marte Maurabakken/Climate Creativity.



5. If you feel calmer now, try to recall that feeling with you when you meet the animal, to make the animal feel safe with you.

Step 3: Meet and greet the animal

1. Encourage the learners to now invite an animal to where they are standing. You and the animal owners can help assign the animals and, if needed, guide the animals to the learners.
2. Invite the learners to meet the animal with compassion. Based on information from the owners about what the animals like, the learners may for example scratch behind ears or stroke their fur, or simply give the animal calm and space.
3. Ask the learners to invite the animal to follow them a few steps, without tugging or pulling. You and the animal owners can help with tips where needed to avoid frustration with the animals.



Learner greets a horse, before they invite the horse to follow them.

Photo by Marte Maurabakken/Climate Creativity.

Step 4: The obstacle course

1. Encourage the learners to now invite the animal to follow them around an "obstacle course" of relevant tasks and puzzles. Each stop/station along the course will have a task. As the teacher you should choose tasks that are suitable for your particular group.
 - a. How long the tasks will take will depend on the individual learners and animals. We recommend you present for example 2-5 tasks per course, but that you bring with you another 5 tasks (or think of variations on the existing tasks) to present to the learners in case they finish quicker than expected.
 - b. The goal is for the learners to experience good communication with a different species, so there is no hurry in completing tasks and no problem with not completing all tasks. Depending on your learners' skills you can for



example leave written instructions at each station, or explain the tasks verbally before the start.

2. Support the learners as they work on the tasks and puzzles with their animals. Suggestions for station tasks and puzzles include:
 - a. Leaving a small mat on the ground. The learners' goal is to get their animal to step on the mat with a front leg.
 - b. Placing 5-10 items in a line, which the learners will go slalom between with their animal.
 - c. Placing a long stick on the ground, where the learners' goal is to get their animal to stand with two legs on one side of the stick and two legs on the other side.
 - d. Placing two long sticks on the ground to create a "corridor", where the learners will walk on the outside along the corridor, with the animal walking in the middle of them inside the corridor between the sticks.
 - e. Preparing curriculum-specific tasks for learners, such as "5 history questions", "write a poem about today", or "read a kind message to the animal". The animal can get food and/or rest while the learners undertake the task.

It is important to note that there is no need to include all (or any!) of these obstacles. Sometimes one or two obstacles are plenty, and other times, especially if the learners are unfamiliar with the animal, walking with the animal on a course without obstacles is challenging enough. Challenges can be fun, but don't make it too hard for them!

Step 5: Reflections

1. Open up a dialogue with your learners about the experience, either in smaller groups or all together. Possible questions to keep the dialogue lively include:
 - a. What do you think the animal liked about moving together with you?
 - b. Think of a person you enjoy working with. What are some traits that make cooperation work well?
 - c. Can you name some other situations where cooperation is important?
 - d. What can be scary when you are cooperating?
 - e. What do you need to feel safe when cooperating with someone?
 - f. What is a good leader, and how do they make you feel?





Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Choose obstacles and complexity according to your learner group's needs.
- Collaborate closely with the animal's owner.

Don't:

Rush the animals or the learners when they're interacting.

Adaptations:

Choose location and animal depending on your learners' needs, for example a wheelchair-suitable environment or an animal who's comfortable with learners doing sudden movements.

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.

References

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