

# A Sense of Place

## Essential Questions:

What is my school site ecosystem like to the organisms that live there?

How do I feel about my school site ecosystem?

**At a Glance:** Learners will read and answer questions about an organism most likely found on their school site. Then learners will imagine what it is like to be an organism at their school site and use sensorial descriptions to write about the organism's experience with its environment.

## Background Information:

In recent years, research has shown that nature has a profound effect on the physical, psychological, and emotional health of children. The term "nature deficit disorder" is used to describe children lacking in exposure to the outdoors and natural living things.

Philosophical writers for centuries have written similarly of the inherent human need for a relationship with nature. Humans develop an attachment to their natural surroundings. They grow with the trees of their environment; they adapt to their landscape. There are geographic characteristics in every place that make it particularly special to a person, that create a sense of attachment and belonging, that make home feel like home.

Wendell Berry has written, "If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are." We can all identify with this thought. We all have



memories of certain places and times that have formed our histories and past landscapes. By reflecting on our environment at present, we get to know it better, creating a stronger relationship and therefore a greater sense of place. By putting oneself in the place of an organism and imagining its senses regarding its ecosystem, a learner will be better able to describe his or hers own feelings about their environment and, in general, develop a better sense of their surroundings.

## Procedures: Part A

1. Pass out an 'A Sense of Place Worksheet' and pencil to each learner.
2. Ask learners to each choose a Garden Earth Naturalist organism card.
3. Ask learners to work as individuals while outdoors to answer the questions on their worksheet based on the information on their GEN organism card.
4. Allow learners to get a feeling for the outdoor environment by exploring the area within defined boundaries.

**Location:** Outdoors or indoors

**Objectives:** Learners will:

- 1) think about organisms of their school site ecosystem.
- 2) examine the individual experiences of these organisms in their habitats.
- 3) realize their own sentiments toward their school site ecosystem.

**Skills:** reading comprehension, creative writing, exploring feelings

**Supplies:**

- Garden Earth Naturalist organism cards
- A Sense of Place worksheets
- Pencils
- Extra paper (journal or scrap paper)

**Subjects:** science, reading, language arts

**Time:** 20 minutes each writing session

5. After about 20 minutes, call students back in and ask them to present some of their discoveries to the group.

### **Part B**

1. Using the 'Another Point of View' example as a guide, instruct learners to write creatively about their organism's environment from the organism's point of view. Descriptions of the organism's senses should be included.
2. Ask learners to trade organism descriptions with other group members and try to guess each other's organisms.

### **Discussion/Assessment:**

#### ***What did you learn about the organism on the GEN organism card that you chose?***

What ecosystem department is your organism associated with?

Any others?

What did you learn about your school site ecosystem?

How do you feel about your school site ecosystem? (How does it make you feel?)

Is this feeling the same or different from your home or neighborhood ecosystem?

#### **Digging Deeper:**

Ask learners to choose a place at home, at a park or other outside area and to write about, including the feelings that place inspires. Ask students to compare their senses in this place with their senses at the school site.

Learners can repeat Part A and Part B using different organisms.

Part B could be played aloud in a manner similar to the 20 questions game.

# A Sense of Place *Worksheet*



What is your organism? \_\_\_\_\_

What does your organism need to survive in its habitat? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does your organism eat? What eats it? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Does it rely on other beings to continue in this environment into the future? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are there other living things that protect it or provide services to keep it healthy? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does your organism give to its environment? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does it take away? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does your organism feel in its environment? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel in your environment? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Another Point of View

Hi!

I live in the soil. Well, really I live in moist, rich soil because my body requires a moist environment to remain moist itself. It can't be too wet, though, or I won't be able to breathe! (I breathe through my skin.)

I love soil! It is delicious - my favorite food. When I eat soil, it passes through my body and becomes richer in nutrients when it leaves my body through the other end. The plants I live around and under really love my nutritious castings. In exchange for this nutrition I provide for the plants, they grow big and healthy and provide shade for the ground under them. This helps stop water from evaporating from the soil, keeping it moist and cool for me.

The larger plants in my neighborhood, the trees and shrubs, drop their leaves in the fall. These leaves help keep the soil moist and keep it from getting too cold down here in the winter. The fallen leaves are also food for my coworkers, the beetles, fungi, bacteria and lots of others. After the leaves are decomposed by them, the soil becomes more nutritious. I love rich, dark soil.

The plants help me out in other ways too. Their roots reach through the soil toward water and nutrients, breaking up clumps and providing air spaces for me to breathe. Ahh, air. And I can thank the plants for the air too - for cleaning it, that is.

Sometimes I get a little too close to the parking lot after a rainstorm. Then, yuck! Runoff with gasoline and oil spreads into the soil. That can really make me sick. I know I should keep my distance, but it is fun to watch the kids at school getting on and off the buses. Some kids actually think I'm scary when they see me! Other kids try to dig my friends and me up to feed to fish. And I always have to look out for birds! I usually try to go deeper when I see anyone digging.

All and all, life is good down here in the soil. I have friends that have gone to live in farms and started families of their own. But as for me, right now, I like it here on the school grounds.

Can you guess who I am?