

Outdoor Classroom Management





Six of One, Half Dozen of the Other

DESCRIPTION

Groups of students use multiple senses to find and classify contrasting objects in the natural environment.

OBJECTIVE

To use the senses to identify and classify objects in the garden laboratory.

MATERIALS

✿ One egg carton per group of three

PREPARATION

On the bottom of each egg carton write two words. One should be a likely quality of a garden object, such as “wet.” The other should be its opposite (“dry”). Use words that will encourage students to use their senses, such as dark/light, rough/smooth, dull/colorful, scented/unscented, scratchy/soft, etc. Label each carton with different opposites. To discourage unsupervised tasting, avoid opposites that refer to taste.



CLASS DISCUSSION

What senses can we use to explore opposites in the garden? In this activity you will be searching for objects that have a specific quality, and those that have the opposite quality. What are some examples of opposites?

ACTION

1. Divide the class into groups of three. Tell the class that each group will get a special collecting container in which to collect 12 items. They shouldn't let any other group see the secret information on the bottom of the carton.

2. Distribute the cartons and demonstrate to each group how the opposites should be placed, with six of each category in a long row. On the bottom of the carton are secret words that tell what category of objects to collect. Every group will be collecting different opposites.
3. Remind students to handle everything gently and to take only small specimens. Allow enough time for students to explore the site and gather the items.
4. When groups are finished, have them exchange cartons and try to determine the opposite categories that the other group collected without looking on the bottom of the carton.
5. Discuss strategies that groups used for identifying the other group's classification.

WRAP UP

What things that you collected felt the scratchiest, looked the most colorful, had the strongest scent, etc.? (*Include an answer from each group about the best example in each category.*) How did you find objects for each category?

Tips for Managing Kids in a Garden Setting

The school garden is a unique learning environment, with activities that are more structured than recess, but also more physical and open-ended than those done in the classroom. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to clarify for themselves and their students what type of behaviors are appropriate to this environment, and then to design learning opportunities that encourage appropriate behaviors.

Helpful Tips

1. **Before leaving the classroom**, explain the special circumstances involved in visiting the school garden to the kids—they are outside but it's not recess, lunch, or PE. Use language to distinguish the garden from the play yard, such as a “garden classroom.”
2. Foster students' sense of ownership and buy in.
 - When choosing students' first garden activity for the year, start with something highly engaging, like harvesting and eating Six Plant Part Burritos or feeding the worms in the worm bin.
 - Provide plentiful opportunities for students to harvest and eat from the garden, and also to use tools they can manage.
 - Look for opportunities to provide students with choices. They may be able to choose, for example, which chore to work on or which seeds to plant.
3. Comfort is really important. For many children, this is a new and possibly strange environment.
 - For kids—provide a shaded area where students can gather for instruction. For garden work, provide kid-sized gloves available and hats if possible. Bring drinking water if possible.
 - For adults—try wearing knee pads, gloves, aprons, hats, sunglasses to stay comfortable in the garden setting.
 - For parents – let them know to send kids in clothes they can get dirty on garden days.
 - Reassure students that most plants and critters in a garden are friendly, and point out the ones to be avoided.
4. Establish clear rules and consequences, and review them regularly. Discuss the following:
 - Proper tool use and ways to avoid danger with tools
 - Running in the garden
 - The difference between “people places” and “plant places”
 - Keeping voices at a reasonable level
 - Care with plants and how to avoid damage to garden spaces
 - Picking and eating only with clear permission from an adult

5. Use team building activities to encourage teamwork and cooperation between students. Revisit this theme regularly with quick ice breakers or team building activities.

- Work in small groups. Having ten or fewer kids per group is extremely helpful.
- Develop a series of activities or stations that groups can rotate through.
- Pair focused individual quiet tasks with more active group garden tasks.
- A class set of clipboards for individual activities helps keep students focused on the task at hand.
- Recruit volunteers to reduce the student-to-adult ratio when possible.
- Design the garden so that it is easy for kids to be successful and abide by the rules.
- Create and maintain clear and wide paths.
- Label tools and store them neatly and safely.
- Make sure the tools are the appropriate size for kids.
- Label plants or plant areas (such as themed areas, e.g., natives, herbs, the Principal's Corner, etc.).

Sample Class Rotation Schedule for an Outdoor Classroom

Sample Station Rotation Schedule A:

Splitting the class between the garden and the classroom

Time	Classroom	Garden
10-10:40	Ms. G's Kinder Class (Group A)	Ms. G's Kinder Class (Group B)
10:40-11:00	RECESS	
11:00-11:40	Ms. G's Kinder Class (Group B)	Ms. G's Kinder Class (Group A)
	LUNCH	
12:20-1:00	Mr. K's 1st Grade Class (Group A)	Mr. K's 1st Grade Class (Group B)
1:05-1:45	Mr. K's 1st Grade Class (Group B)	Mr. K's 1st Grade Class (Group A)

Sample Station Rotation Schedule B:

Entire class in garden with two groups rotating between independent and teacher-led activities

Time	Group A	Group B
10:00-10:05	Whole Group Introduction: Seeds	
10:05-10:20	Seed Scavenger Hunt (Individual)	Seed Sowing with Teacher
10:20-10:35	Seed Sowing with Teacher	Seed Scavenger Hunt
10:35-10:40	Whole Group Wrap Up: Tasting Edible Seeds	