Connecting with special places in nature - Teacher Guide

To learn more about these activities, please read the Climate Mental Health Activities Introduction

Activity Summary

In this lesson, students will take time to connect to a place that is special to them. They are asked to sketch the features of their special place and prompted to think about how they interact with that place. In pairs, students share their drawings and responses with a classmate. Lastly, they are given time to individually reflect on how their actions can care for their special place and share those actions with other students as part of an end-of-class group discussion.

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| Learning Objectives     | ● To identify emotions that students have for places in nature through drawing  
                           ● To identify students’ everyday connections to nature  
                           ● To help students build reciprocal relationships with natural places |
| Social-Emotional Learning Focus | ● Students identify their emotions, explain their thinking to a peer, and consider caring actions (CASEL Core Competencies: Self-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making) |
| Strategies              | 3. Listen and validate feelings  
                           4. Encourage and take action  
                           7. Use social, emotional, and postivie coping skills |
| Materials               | ❑ Materials for drawing such as copy paper, colored pencils, markers, etc.  
                           ❑ Student-facing display such as a whiteboard for end-of-class discussion  
                           ❑ (Optional) Sticky notes for group display of caring actions |
| Material Preparation    | ❑ Have materials ready for students at the start of the lesson for drawing |
| Sources and Research    | ● Lesson modified from activity in S. Semken’s Geology of the American Southwest college course  
                           ● Strategies for managing climate change discourse for classrooms in which teaching climate change may be controversial: https://cleanet.org/dev/clean/literacy/tools/controversy.html |

https://cires.colorado.edu/outreach/
Instructional Process

1) **Identify a place in nature:** Ask students to think about a place in nature that is special to them. You can provide examples that draw from the local environment (a family farm, city park, camping location, one’s backyard, neighborhood street). Emphasize that places can be urban or rural, and located at different scales (neighborhood, city, region). Once students have a place in mind, ask them to describe what their place means to them (e.g. what makes it special).

2) **Draw features of the place:** Using the copy paper provided, ask students to draw the physical features of their special place. Encourage students to label the features and to write down any words that describe their place or words that they associated with their place. *If time allows, consider the optional extension activity (right) to help students consider other students’ place meanings.*

3) **Identify connections:** Ask students to annotate the drawing to show how they interact with that place. Pair students together to have them describe their connections to their special places. Encourage them to think about how their interactions with their respective places might be similar or different and why.

4) **Consider reciprocity:** Prompt students individually to consider what actions they can take to show that they care for their special place. Encourage students to start small and think about caring actions that they could take on any day. Have students consider how their actions give back to nature and how that, in turn, helps nature give back to them. Ask students to write one caring action on a sticky note to place on the classroom whiteboard. Read the contributed actions aloud to the whole class, noting any themes in the actions the students suggest. Write any additional actions on the whiteboard next to the sticky notes.

**Closure**

To close the class, use the student action ideas to help summarize the take-home lessons from the activity: a) how small actions can have a collective impact and b) how humans are part of nature through their interactions with special places.
Potential extension:
Use this as a pre-post activity, having students engage with the process as they enter the academic year/semester and then asking them again as they exit. Compare and contrast their drawings, meanings, interactions, and ideas for caring action and have students reflect on how their ideas may have been influenced by what they took away from the course/instruction.