

Forest Bathing

Age range: All ages

Total time: 40 minutes to an hour (5 steps)

Big idea: We can use forest bathing as a way to connect with the nature that is immediately around us.

Guiding questions:

- 1) What is forest bathing?
- 2) How do we disconnect from the busy world around us and connect with nature?
- 3) How can this practice help us slow down and relax?

Materials needed: Yourself, internet access, a natural area (could be your backyard, front yard, a park, or just a nearby tree or patch of grass!)

Info for teachers/parents: It may be helpful to act as the timer for this activity, so students aren't disrupted by electronics.

Step 1 (5 mins):

Before we begin, take a moment to peruse this webpage to introduce you to the concept of forest bathing:

<https://childhoodbynature.com/forest-bathing-listening-to-the-trees-and-bowing-to-the-flowers/>

(Note for parents and teachers: if students are young, you can read and summarize it for them. Older students can do this lesson mostly on their own with optional help on timing of activities).

Threshold exercise: Go outside to your chosen location. Leave your electronics inside and bring only your watch or a timer (or a parent to time for you). Find a spot on the ground that you will be comfortable sitting for some time. Preferably sit on the bare ground or lie a coat down and sit on that (no chairs). Look around you and take note of any interesting natural features you see.

Step 2 (15-20 mins):

Grounding and calibration activities.

Grounding: Place your hands on the ground and close your eyes. Take several deep breaths and notice the sounds around you. As you sit in silence, try to filter out human noises (cars, airplanes, etc.) and hone into the nature sounds. What do you hear? Squirrels? Birds? Wind rustling the leaves of the trees? Notice how the ground feels under your hands. Is it hard? Soft? Wet and squishy or dry and rustling? Can you feel grass, dead leaves, roots, something else?

Calibration: Open your eyes and slowly look around at the natural features around you. Settle your gaze on something that catches your eye. It could be as big as a tree, or as small as a blade of grass, plant or animal. Imagine you have suddenly transformed into that thing. Say to yourself, "I am the _____." What do you feel, see, smell, hear, taste as that thing? Try to see from the perspective of the plant or animal you have become. This is a way of calibrating our senses.

Step 3 (5 mins):

Go back inside and sit in a spot preferably by a window and with natural light. Think about your experience. Do you feel calmer, more relaxed than you were before beginning the activity? It can be hard to stay connected with nature in our daily lives, especially when we are stuck at home. As you look out the window, try to hold on to some of the feelings you had outside. We can capture a bit of that calm even through a window in our rooms, cars, or school.

Step 4 (5 mins):

We are going to bring the peacefulness of nature indoors. Listen to the provided recording of a deep breathing exercise.

Link to breathing exercise: <https://youtu.be/Y5OqpfZrwfk>

Stay seated and keep your eyes closed. Try to hang on to the feeling of grounding as you did outside. If it helps, place one hand on the ground.

Step 5 (15-20 mins):

Think about how you felt doing the activities. Were they helpful? Would you consider doing them again?

Write a letter to a relative or friend about your experience with forest bathing. Be sure to be descriptive about how you felt before and after, as well as what parts of it you enjoyed. Challenge your letter recipient to try out a smaller version of forest bathing and compare your experiences!

Feel free to use any of the activities – noticing, grounding, calibrating, breathing – anytime you need a moment of calm. Try to do the entire routine again somewhere else – switch from front yard to backyard, walk to the local park, etc.