

A Sense of Place

Major Concept

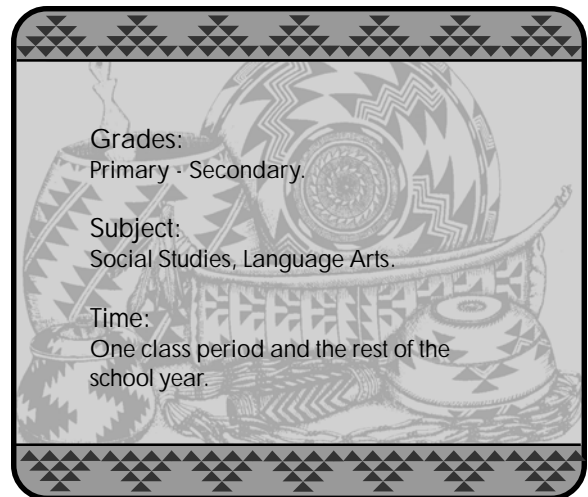
People who have a sense of belonging to the environment feel ownership of it, and a desire to protect it.

Objective

As a result of this activity students will demonstrate a concern for maintaining a connection with a special place or object.

Background

Developing a sense of place and belonging is fundamental to American Indian life. When people embrace and treasure a place or thing, they are willing to actively work to maintain its integrity. This lesson is central to the curriculum. Hence, the reason it is suggested for all grade levels. There are five activities that comprise the lesson. Collectively, they elicit a feeling of being "centered and grounded" with the environment.



Procedure

Activity 1. Grok a Rock

Instruct students to bring to class a rock the size of a fifty-cent piece. Encourage them to be selective, and bring a rock that attracts their attention rather than simply the first one they find. Keep extra rocks on hand for those students who forget to bring their own.

With rock in-hand, have your students sit in a circle. Tell them that for the next minute they are to get to know their rock. They may feel it, smell it, examine it.

After one minute, collect the rocks in a bag. Shake the bag to mix up the rocks. Now, have the students hold out their hands so they can pass the rocks each other, one at a time.

Have your students to close their eyes and keep them closed until instructed otherwise. Begin passing the rocks one at a time, clockwise. Tell the students when they receive their rock they are to keep it, continue to pass the remaining rocks, and not to open their eyes. After all the rocks have circulated, been held, or otherwise passed back to you, have students open their eyes and observe their rock.

Have each student say if they have their rock, and if so, explain why they are certain. Ask how they made their decision.

Activity 2. The One Meter Hike

This activity heightens the senses. Have your students work in groups of three. Each group receives a piece of string one meter in length and at least one magnifying glass. Challenge them to find a grassy area of the school ground in which to lay their string in a straight line. Give students 15 minutes to explore the environment along the string. Encourage them to record their discoveries in a group journal. Emphasize that discovery is the goal. Back in the classroom have the students share



their discoveries. Finally, have your students close their eyes and imagine what it would be like to be a tiny creature living in the environment they explore. Have them write a story about their adventures as that creature.

Activity 3. Your Special Place

One of the rarest commodities of modern life is silence. Without silence it is difficult to be deeply reflective or become spiritually energized. To retain our humanness we need to commune with ourselves, and to bond with the world around us regularly. One of the most powerful experiences for students is silent listening. Students learn to deeply appreciate the opportunity to be alone, if only for a short time.



Challenge your students to find a “special spot” somewhere in their environment. Encourage them to find their spot outside. It might be under a tree near their home, an open hillside across town, or on a rock by the river. Their special spot can be looked upon as a spiritual place, known only to them. Tell your students it may take them several tries to find a special place. Help them realize it may not be easy to find place of personal ownership, but with effort it will

become known to them.

Instruct your students to visit their special spot three times each week for at least 10 minutes. You may wish to agree on the days and times they are to go to their spot.

Discuss with your students their thoughts and feelings when visiting their special place. Treat all responses equally.

Activity 4. The Journal

Journals are a personal record of every day events, feelings, and thoughts. Many people keep a written record of their thoughts and emotions. Throughout history many important people have passed along their vision of the world from which future generations have learned.

One of the strengths of keeping a journal is that writing helps you clarify thoughts and feelings. Often, we communicate in writing differently than we do verbally. Teachers can gain new insights of their students from reading their thoughts. The journal is an excellent technique to help students develop a "sense of place."

These guidelines may help when assigning journal writing to your students:

- a. Have your students write every day. Try to make it a habit.
- b. Write in the same place at the same time each day. For this activity encourage your students to write while visiting their special spot.

- c. Write at least one page each day. Let students write about anything they want. However, if your students are having trouble thinking of things to write you can give them themes, such as: patterns in nature, similarities of things around them, examples of change, variety of objects in their immediate environment.
- d. Use the journal to address feelings and thoughts, not just as a chronology of daily events.



Activity 5. Adopt-A-Spot

People often feel powerless concerning economic, political, or social problems. But even if individual action by itself cannot solve problems, it can be the basis for a positive, personally enriching way of living.

Have your students read the article, "My 20 Foot Swath." Discuss the following questions:

- a. What worries this man?
- b. What does he try to do about it?
- c. Does he think his response is effective?
- d. What response do you make when faced with a problem of this kind?

Have the class identify a waste, litter or recycling problem of their own, and determine what to do about it.





MY 20 FOOT SWATH

*by Kenneth V. Lundberg
Covenant Companion*

“I worried so much about world hunger today, that I went home and ate five cookies.” Did personal or global problems ever become so overwhelming that you were immobilized, or driven to some action that actually aggravated the problem? Have you experienced such frustration about the hopelessness of solving the problems of poverty, environmental pollution, or human suffering that you could avoid it only by deciding that you were powerless to do anything about their alleviation? This is called Responsibility Assumption Overload (AAO). Here’s how I dealt with the feeling.

I park my car a way from my building at work. That way I get both exercise and a parking space! Everyone else competes for spots next to the entrance. My morning and late afternoon strolls take me on a stretch of lawn between the tennis courts and the soccer field, and across an occasionally used softball diamond. The lawn is twenty feet wide, more or less. Soft and green, it was originally very littered. Tennis players discard tennis ball containers (and their flip-tops), worn out sweat socks, broken shoelaces and candy bar wrappers. Soccer game spectators leave behind beer bottles and junk food cellophane.

In my early days it disgusted me, and my thoughts centered on ways of correcting the situation: writing letters to the campus

newspaper (no doubt totally ignored); campaigning for anti-litter regulations (who would enforce them?); organizing a “Zap-Day” cleanup (leaving 364 days for littering). All my noble efforts would have demonstrated my indignation, raised my blood pressure, and attracted attention, but they would not have changed the appearance and/or condition of the area.

So, I decided to take ownership. I would be the solution. I did not tell anyone of this; it was probably against some rule or another. I decided that I would be responsible for the environmental quality of this twenty-foot swath. I did not care what other parts of the campus were like. They were someone else's problem. But each day, going from and to my car, I picked up litter.

At first, it was as much as I could conveniently carry. Then I made a game of it, limiting my picking to ten items each way. It was an exciting day when I realized I was picking faster than “they” were littering. Finally, the great day arrived when I looked back on my twenty feet of lawn now perfectly clean.

Where did I put the litter? At first, I brought it I’ve done this for several years now. Has general campus appearance changed? Not much! Have litterers stopped littering? No! Then if nothing has changed, why bother?



Here lies the secret. Something has changed. My twenty-foot swath and me! That five minute walk is a high spot of the day. Instead of fussing and stewing and storing up negative thoughts, I begin and end my workday in a positive mood. My perspective is brighter. I can enjoy my immediate surroundings-and myself-as I pass through a very special time and space.

It is better because of me. I am better because of it. We enjoy the relationship. Maybe, even, 'it' looks forward with anticipation to my coming.

My 20 foot swath, reprinted with permission, *AVR Teacher's Resource Guide*, Association of Vermont Recyclers, PO Box 1244 Montpelier, VT 05601.



