
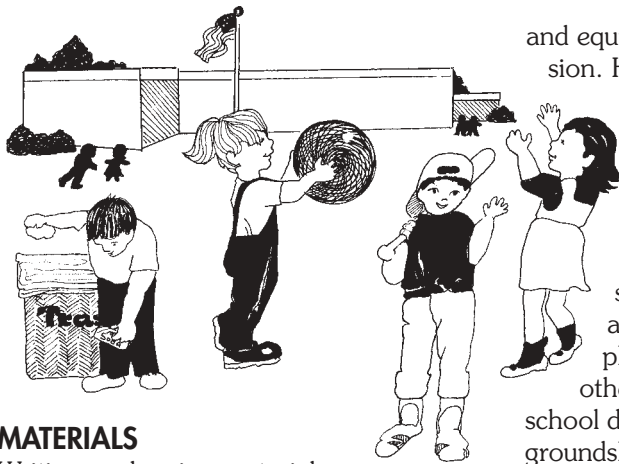


School Ground Caretakers

 **LEVEL:** Grades PreK-4
SUBJECTS: Science, Language Arts, Social Studies
SKILLS: Analyzing, applying, brainstorming, classifying, collecting, comparing similarities and differences, comprehending, cooperating, describing, developing self-understanding, discussing, evaluating, following directions, identifying, inferring, interviewing, listening, locating, observing, perceiving spatial relationships, predicting, solving problems, sorting, taking responsibility, valuing, writing



and equipment, they rise to the occasion. How do they learn to respect and be responsible caretakers of the outdoor classroom? That's what this lesson is all about. Part of their learning is an awareness of who picks up trash, cuts the grass, shovels the sidewalks when it snows, plants any flowers and trees, repairs the playground equipment, and otherwise tends the grounds. If your school does not have an official groundskeeper or custodian for the grounds, you and your students can explore to find out how these duties are accomplished.

Students will write or draw in their **My School Ground Journal** sheets in Session Three. This is an opportunity for students to reflect about the school ground. What or how they write or draw is open to their personal creativity and should be fun. Writing or drawing in a journal is a time and place for self-expression. Sharing journals with others is optional.

Safety is always the prime concern when bringing young students outdoors. Be sure to emphasize safety rules appropriate for your situation before heading outside. Use special caution if you are in an area with poisonous or thorny plants, insects, animals, or other school ground conditions that could be a hazard.

GETTING STARTED

Gather writing and drawing materials and photocopy the **My School Ground Journal** sheet, one per student. You may want to do some preliminary scouting on the grounds to decide where students can walk and

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Students observe and collect items on the school ground, choose their own special place, and work with school groundskeepers to be respectful caretakers of their outdoor environment.

OBJECTIVES

- The student will:
- give examples of both general and closeup observations of the surrounding school ground;
 - collect objects for further study without disturbing nature;
 - group found objects according to various categories;
 - choose a personal, special place on the school ground for observing and reflecting;
 - evaluate the school ground as an outdoor classroom and his or her role as its caretaker; and
 - interview the school groundskeeping staff to build respect for what school grounds need and learn how students can help become caretakers.

ESTIMATED TEACHING TIME

Four sessions: 45 to 60 minutes each.

MATERIALS

Writing or drawing materials and photocopies of the attached **My School Ground Journal** sheet.
Optional: hand lenses, bags or containers for collecting outdoor items.

VOCABULARY

caretaker, disturb, environment, groundskeeper, man-made, outdoor classroom, respect

RELATED LESSON

Your School Ground Through New Eyes

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Teachers work hard to create a good learning environment in their classrooms. Challenge yourself and your students to consider the school grounds as a classroom too. This "outdoor classroom" can be as conducive to learning as the indoor classroom. It offers wonderful opportunities for students to learn through exploring, discovering, observing, directly experiencing, and valuing their surroundings.

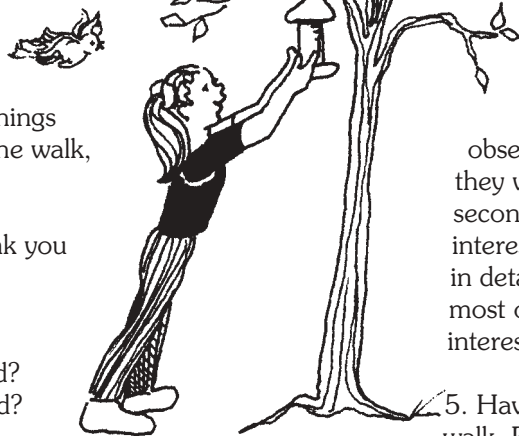
When you encourage students to make positive contributions to their indoor learning environment by showing respect and by taking care of classroom supplies

collect items in Session One and to locate a large enough area that will offer potential private places for students in Session Three. Make arrangements for a school groundskeeper to meet with your students during Session Four. It may be most effective to meet outdoors in his or her work setting. Involve students in the process of deciding whether to collect living things. (See Session One, Step 2. If you allow students to collect living things, do Session One and Session Two on the same day.)

PROCEDURE

SESSION ONE

1. Tell students they will be going outside to take a close look at the school ground and to collect two things that interest them. Before taking the walk, ask:
 - What kinds of things do you think you will find? Record the items they brainstorm in a visible place.
 - What would you most like to find? What do you hope you don't find?
 - What part of the school ground would you most like to explore? Why?
 - How can we show respect for nature on our walk? Make a T chart; list ways students can show respect for nature on one side and ways they show disrespect on the other side. (*Respect: Always be kind to nature. Be alert and watchful. Pick up trash and provide trash cans. Plant trees and flowers. Disrespect: Pull up, break off, or injure living plants. Kill insects. Disturb animals or their homes.*)
2. Discuss whether or not to collect living things. (If students decide to collect living things, you may want students to add more ways they can show respect for nature.) If necessary, remind them they should only collect something, if there are a lot of them at the site, to only collect an animal, if they can keep it alive long enough to learn from it before returning it to the place it was found, and to leave the environment as little changed as possible.
3. Review behavior and safety guidelines before going outdoors. Make it a rule that students must be able to see you - and you them - at all times. You may want to carry a bright scarf or colorful balloon to help them keep you in sight.



Encourage students to look under, into, behind, and around items in the outdoors, if they can do so safely. Students allergic to bees, wasps or other insect bites should take precautions to prevent an incident. Students may want to get down on their knees for a close-up look at small objects. Decide if you are going to let students collect trash items. If so, what kind (e.g., bottles, cans, cigarette butts, wrappers): Students should not collect anything that will hurt them (e.g., biting insects, poisonous plants, sharp objects, and so on).

4. As a class, walk around the school ground twice. On the first go-around, students observe and decide which objects they would like to collect. Use the second walk to collect items of special interest. Allow time to observe objects in detail. The goal is not to collect the most objects, but rather the most interesting items.
5. Have "show and tell" after the walk. Refer students back to the brainstorm list in Step 1. Compare the expected items with what they actually collected by asking:
 - Did we find what we thought we would find in our school ground?
 - What surprised you? Why?
 - What new things can you learn about our school ground from looking at this collection?
 - In what way are all of these things connected? (*They were all collected on the school ground and are all part of our school ground community. Everything here is connected because they share the same surroundings. There are other ways also.*)
 - What did you see on the school ground that you liked? That you did not like?
 - Who uses our school ground for a home?
 - Is our school ground growing any food for animals and/or people? If so, who is growing it? For whom? What, if anything, is being grown for other living things? What is growing at our school that might be food for butterflies? Other insects? Birds?

6. Tell students to save their items for Session Two.

SESSION TWO

1. If your students are just learning to categorize and sort, ask them to work in small groups at tables to group the things they found outdoors. Help them sort and group by offering categories. First, they find the living or once-living things, then the nonliving things. Then offer several other “opposites” to help them sort: brown, not brown; green, not green; hard, soft; bumpy, smooth; man-made, natural; plants, animals; heavy, light; from trees, not from trees; food for someone, not food for anyone; and so on.

For students with some categorizing experience, explain that they will use their objects to form groups of things that go together in certain ways. (See Session One of the FLP lesson “Tree-mendous!” for more about categorizing skills.)

Have each student choose one of his or her objects and hold it up so it can be seen by everyone. Select one student and his or her item. Ask “Who else has something that goes together with this?” Have those who think their items are similar or related stand together, holding their objects. Members of the group then tell the class why these items might go together.

Ask, “In what other ways might your objects be grouped?” List their categories in a visible place.

Call out one of the listed categories. Students with things they think fit in that category bring their objects and gather as a group. Ask the rest of the class, “Do you agree that everything in this group could belong here? Why or why not?”

Once there is agreement about the makeup of the group, have everyone sit down. A volunteer then calls another category.

2. Select several students with items that may be grouped together and add one or two with items that don't belong. Ask:
- Do all of these items belong together?
 - Which item(s) does not belong with this group? Why?

Repeat this mixed grouping with other collected items.

3. Summarize by asking:

- How did we use our school ground to learn new things today?
- Why could we call our school ground an “outdoor classroom”?
- What did you learn about the grouping or categorizing of items from the school ground?

Have students return any living insects or animals to their homes. Tell students that they will be going outside later to look for special places they like in the school ground.

SESSION THREE

1. Tell students they will be going outdoors again, this time to learn about the school ground from their own special place. Review safety rules and appropriate behavior. Each student will select a special and safe place all his or her own, but for safety reasons they must stay in the area you show them, and they again must be able to see you (and you see them) at all times.

Explain that the special place is a quiet and private space of their choice. It is a place to sit quietly to listen and look, without talking to anyone. Each student will use his or her senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and also emotions to learn about this special place. Remind students that taste is the one sense they will not be using, and caution students not to put anything in the mouth. Review the senses as you invite students to look with their eyes, to hear with their ears, to feel with their hands, and to smell with their noses. Suggest they might be more aware of sounds, if they close their eyes while they listen, or of fragrances, if they close their eyes while they breath deeply through the nose to smell. Talk about the ways we feel things not just with our fingertips, but also with the rest of our skin (e.g., wind, rain). Also, we have the feelings inside us. For example, ask them to say words for how they feel at a birthday party, in a cave, in a dark room all alone, snuggling in the lap of a loving adult, at a swimming pool on a sunny day, when someone shares with them, and so on. Invite students to use all their senses except taste to experience their special place.

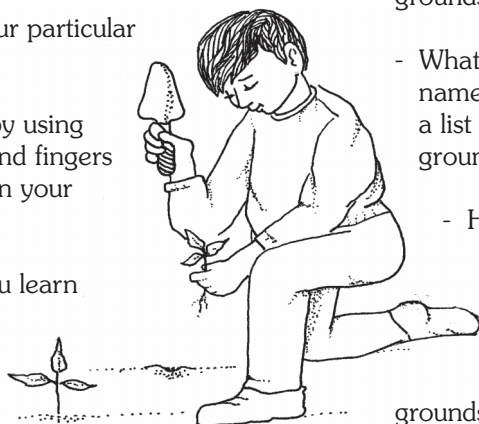
2. Distribute a **My School Ground Journal** sheet to each student. Tell students they may draw or write on their journal pages what they observe by seeing, hearing, smelling, and touching, and feelings inside during the quiet time in their special place. (The quiet time will last for three to six

minutes, depending on the age of the students). Encourage them to look closely at things in and near their special places. Remind students that **My School Ground Journal** sheet is their opportunity to express - by writing or drawing - something about their school ground, whether it is how they used their senses, how they feel about the school ground, something they never noticed before about the school ground, and so on. Tell students that sharing journal entries is optional.

Have students gather writing or drawing materials, **My School Ground Journal** sheets, and hand lenses (optional) and go outdoors. Students walk slowly around the area you have chosen twice, looking for places they particularly like. They then select their special places and begin their quiet observations.

3. Back in the classroom, encourage students to discuss what they discovered and to compare observations. Depending on the age level, ask:

- Why did you choose your particular special place?
- What did you discover by using your ears, eyes, nose, and fingers and skin as you stayed in your special place?
- What new things did you learn about the school ground after this quiet time in your special place?
- How is your special place like an outdoor classroom?
- What emotions did you notice while staying in your special place?
- What did you like about your own special place? What didn't you like?
- Why are quiet, private places important for everyone to have?
- When might you want to visit your special place again?
- How would you feel if someone damaged or put trash in your special place?
- How might you help take care of your special place so you and others can enjoy it?



4. Ask students to think about what their writing and drawing means to them and what their work tells about their special spot. Invite volunteers to share journal entries and drawings.
5. Compare care of the indoor classroom and the outdoor classroom by asking:
 - What does it mean to be a "caretaker"?
 - How are we good caretakers of our indoor classroom?
 - Who do you think takes care of your special place and our school ground now? If you don't know, how can you find out?
 - What do you think (person's name) does to help take care of your special place? The whole school ground?

Explain that the class will be meeting with a school groundskeeper (person's name). Ask:

- What questions would you like to ask (person's name) about caring for our school ground? Make a list and save it for the visit. Give a copy to the groundskeeper to use for preparation.
- How could we find out ways we could best help (person's name)?

SESSION FOUR

1. Get students ready for the visit with the school groundskeeper. Review courtesy and any safety rules that may apply if you are going to the groundskeeper's work area.
2. Introduce the groundskeeper and invite him or her to briefly explain the things he or she does to help care for the school grounds. Students ask their prepared questions, followed by an informal question-and-answer time based on interests and the attention span of the group. End by reviewing and reinforcing how students and the groundskeeper can work together as caretaker partners in caring for the school ground.
3. After the visit ask, "How can we be good caretakers of our outdoor classroom?" Have each student draw at least three things he or she can do to be a good caretaker of the school ground. You may want to send the drawings to the school groundskeeper along with a thank you note and letter of commitment to help care for the school ground from the students.

4. Depending on the group and your situation, plan and do an actual school ground improvement project. See Extensions and Variations 5.
5. Summarize the lesson by asking:
 - How are we all caretakers of the land?
 - What will you share with others about the importance of being caretakers of the land?

EVALUATION OPTIONS

1. Make a mural with students' drawing themselves in their quiet places. Add caption cards telling their ideas about being respectful caretakers of the school ground. Or have students make a mural titled: "Our School Grounds Are in Our Hands." Have students trace their hands and write in their fingers things they could do as school ground caretakers.
2. Set up a random display of items collected on the school ground visits. Observe students' ability to group items according to specific categories.
3. Have students write or draw about one of the following phrases.
 - I can show that I am a caretaker by...
 - One thing I should like to do to make my school ground better is...
 - Hearing, seeing, smelling, and touching are important senses because...
2. Guide students to make a simple map of the school ground and use it for various activities. Have students mark their special place on their maps. Then ask students to pair with partners and use each other's maps to locate the partner's special place. Ask students to prepare written or oral directions that include pacing for distance estimation or actual measurements in English or metric units. Or use your map to have students mark the places where they found the items they collected. After the items have been used in the classroom, those that appropriately belong in the school ground can be returned to their original places. Discard trash or have the class note locations where litter is often found and arrange to place a trash can in that location.
3. Have students make a list of items found on the school ground. Invite students from another class to go on a scavenger hunt.
4. Add challenge to your categorizing activities. Early learners will enjoy counting the number of objects found in several categories and making bar graphs to compare quantities. Making Venn diagrams as they group items found in the school yard will challenge more capable students. (See the **Venn Diagram #1** located in the Appendixes.)
5. After discussing ways in which the school grounds can be changed, improved or enhanced, let students decide what contributions they would like to make and work on them as a class project. Be sure to involve the groundskeeper. Plant flowers and/or trees, keep trash picked up (arrange for a trash can if necessary), hang bird feeders, and add students' ideas as appropriate for the group.

EXTENSIONS AND VARIATIONS

1. Add some art with one or more of the following activities.
 - Make collages with the objects collected. Have students choose a title for the display and make a gallery of the collages on your wall or in the hallway.
 - Make rubbings of some of the collected objects using crayons or markers. Discuss and compare the different textures.
 - Decorate bags for collecting items in Session One. Give students a picture to color, cut out, and paste or tape on their bag.



-
6. Expand school caretaking. Invite a school custodian to talk with students about interior building care and maintenance and how they can help.
 7. Invite students to work in pairs to create a story about one of the following:
 - Their outdoor classroom: what it means to them and how they care for it.
 - How they, as caretakers of Earth, will keep it clean and make it a better place to live.
 8. Feature your groundskeeper as the subject of a V.I.P. bulletin board. Include information from your interview and photos or drawings of the groundskeeper at work. This is a great way for students to express appreciation and recognition for school support staff.

RESOURCES

See Environment in the Resources located in the Appendixes.

WEB SITE

Keep America Beautiful. 2002. <http://www.kab.org/>

EDUCATOR'S NOTES

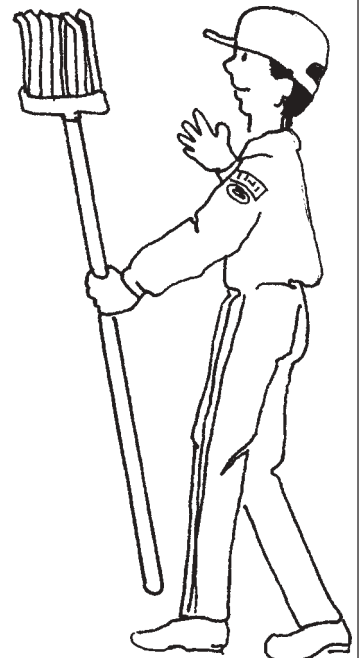
MY SCHOOL GROUND JOURNAL

Name: _____

Write or draw about things you see, hear, smell, and touch, and emotions.

Things I thought about are:

One thing I would like to do to make my school ground better is:



*People are joined to the land by work.
Land, work, people, and community are all
comprehended in the idea of culture.*

Wendell Berry, Sierra,
September-October 1983