
Going After the Cows

Activity Overview

Students reflect on a personal natural experience and learn about how others have been nurtured by nature.

Objectives

Student will:

- Express their emotional connections to nature
- Learn how nature effects other people's lives
- Learn the importance of nature for every living being

Subjects

Language Arts

Grades

2 through 12

Activity Time

50 minutes

Season

Any

Materials

Writing materials and books about natural experiences

State Standards

Language Arts:

Use effective reading strategies (A.4.1, A.8.1, A.12.1)

Read, interpret, and critically analyze literature (A.4.2, A.8.2, A.12.2)

Read & discuss texts to understand human experience (A.4.3, A.8.3, A.12.3)

Read to acquire information (A.4.4, A.8.4, A.12.4)

Create or produce writing (B.4.1, B.8.1, B.12.1)

Plan, revise, edit, & publish writing (B.4.2, B.8.2, B.12.2)

Understand forms, structures, & punctuation marks (B.4.3, B.8.3, B.12.3)

Conduct then communicate research (F.4.1, F.8.1, F.12.1)

Background

Many children today have little to no access to a natural environment. Their homes and schools are surrounded by concrete, pavement, bricks, and glass. Many children lack a safe place for adventure seeking and discovery making. This limits their hand-on experience with the natural life cycles and scientific processes that occur every day. Many school districts are realizing the benefits of having a natural classroom on the schoolgrounds. Some schools have available natural space and others are creating their own. A school can choose to plant a native plant restoration, a rain garden, a butterfly garden, vegetable garden and any combination of planting. Schoolground native plantings can be safe, special places for student to experience the natural world.

This activity offers students an opportunity to reflect on experiences other young persons have had with nature along with their own personal experience.

Activity Description

1. First start by reading the short story about Laura Ingalls, which is included at the end of the activity, or another story about a young person's experience in nature. Then as a class briefly discuss why these natural experiences were important to the authors.
2. Next have the students talk about their different individual experiences they have had in/with nature. These can be experiences they have had with family, friends or even at school. Encourage them to think about a time when nature fascinated or mystified them. Help students to understand it is important to express not only what they observed but how it made them feel.
3. Then have students write about their experience.

Extensions

- This activity could be used as a journal topic for a restoration journal
- After writing about an experience share it with others or compile a class journal.

Additional Resources

- Davis, Julie Bawden. (2004). *Nature and nurture*. Native Plants.
- Wilder, L.I. (1991). *Little house in the Ozarks*. New York NY; Galahad Books.

Assessments

- Students can create their own rubric for what should be expected of their writing. They can then use this for self or peer assessment.

Going After the Cows

Going After the Cows April 1923

With the birds singing, the trees budding, and “the green grass growing all around,” as we used to sing in school, who would not love the country and prefer farm life to any other? We are glad that so much time can be spent out-of-doors while going about the regular affairs of the day, thus combining pleasure with work and adding good health for full measure.

I have never lost my childhood delight in going after the cows.

I have a favorite way of doing this, for I have never lost my childhood delight of going after the cows. I still slip away from other things for the sake of the walk through the pastures, down along the creek, and over the hill to the farthest corner where the cows are usually found, as you can all bear witness.

Bringing home the cows is the childhood memory that oftenest recurs to me. I think it is because the mind of a child is peculiarly attuned to the beauties of nature, and the voices of the wildwood, and the impression they made was deep.

“To him who, in the love of nature, holds community with her visible forms, she speaks a various language,”* you know. And I am sure old Mother Nature talked to me in all the languages she knew when, as a child, I loitered along the cow paths, forgetful of milking time and stern parents waiting, while I gathered wildflowers, waded in the creek, watched the squirrels hastening to their homes in treetops, and listened to the sleepy twittering of birds.

Wild strawberries grew in grassy nooks in springtime. The wild plum thickets along the creek yielded their fruit about the time of the first frost in the fall. And all the time between, there were ever varied, never failing delights along the cow paths of the old pasture. Many a time, instead of me finding the cows, they, on their journey home unurged, found me and took me home with them.

The voices of nature do not speak so plainly to us as we grow older, but I think it is because, in our busy lives, we neglect her until we grow out of sympathy. Our ears and eyes grow dull, and beauties are lost to us that we should still enjoy.

Life was not intended to be simply a round of work, no matter how interesting and important that work may be. A moment’s pause to watch the glory of a sunrise or a sunset is soul satisfying, while a bird’s song will set the steps to music all day long.

*From “Thanatopsis,” William Cullen Bryant.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House in the Ozarks: The Rediscovered Writings*.
Edited by Stephen W. Hines. 1991. Nashville, TN. Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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State Standards

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Going After the Cows (cont.)

Going After the Cows April 1923

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