Teaching Toolkit—

POTTER COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Step 3 - Meaningful Activities in Environmental Education

Here are listed a handful of major learning types and corresponding activities within the realm of EE. After referring to steps 1 and 2 in the toolkit, ideas for activities can be difficult. These various activity ideas can serve as you springboard in many different lessons.

Activities in Outdoor Skills Learning / Adventure Education:

These activities often have simple, non-academic learning objectives, but play a big role in EE. These activities can help students feel empowered and more comfortable in the outdoors, which many may need your facilitation to accomplish for themselves.

1) Guided hikes—this is a staple in many lessons, as it lends itself to many other extensions in learning while on the trail. You might try making stops along the way to pose a challenge or questions, or have students work in teams for various exercises.
2) Survival Challenges—fire-starting, shelter-building, etc. practice are great skills to instill in students, and a very accessible idea for a wide range of age groups

Sensory / Play Learning:

Especially for those 12 and younger, the power of outdoor (and indoor) play is not to be underestimated! Students learn to flex their imagination, creativity, critical thinking, and logic through play. Some adult audiences will also appreciate being asked to take part in play - tapping into their "inner child."

1) Games mimicking phenomenon in the natural world—adaptations, camouflage, predator/prey, invasive species, and more
2) Scavenger hunts—whether indoors or outside, or all natural objects or planted challenge items, this form of play is a great precursor to practices in observation and critical thinking.
3) Challenge of the senses—adopt-a-tree activity and other similar challenges. Adopt-a-tree includes pairs of students, one blind-folded, the other leading the blinded partner to a nearby tree. The blind-folded partner must take note of a few descriptors based on smell and touch, return safely to the start, and try to find the same tree after taking off their blindfold.

Creative Expression:

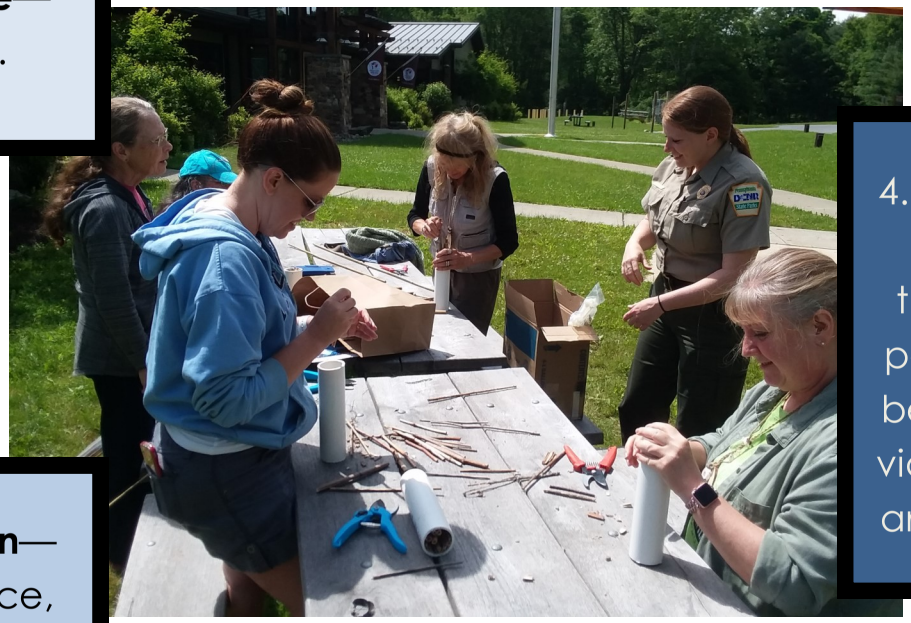
Crucial during the preoperational stage, and through onto adulthood, open expression and creativity is proven to indicate heightened emotional intelligence, critical thinking skills, decision making, and leadership skills. The world of EE is full of opportunities to incorporate this type of learning activity.

1) "Earthworks"— In a supervised setting (to avoid plucking potentially rare or even dangerous plants) ask students to create an artwork made only from things found in nature. Encourage them to find many different textures, colors, and shapes of materials for their piece of art.
2) Nature Writing—a keystone of EE. The likes of Racheal Carson, Sigurd Olson, Mary Oliver, and many more have created writings, ranging from research to poetry, that have made an impact in environmental action and sustainability efforts. Guide students though how to write poems, record observations through a Daubenmire Square (ProjectWILD), creative writings, and journaling purpose and techniques.

Above all, it is imperative to facilitate EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING. This means that students are learning by DOING, not by lecture, connect-the-dots, dry forms of learning. Even the simplest of activities can include an experiential aspect that teaches students valuable lessons including problem Solving/Critical Thinking, Teamwork, and more! See the back of this page for another explanation of Experiential Learning.

Experiential Learning Model

1. **Concrete Experience**—***DOING*** something.



2. **Reflective Observation**—Reviewing the experience, answering the ***"What?"***

3. **Synthesize Observations–** Make larger assessments of the experience, question how it can answer larger questions, answering the ***"So What?"***

4. **Active Application**—using the experience to make thoughtful decisions in life, potentially, changes for the betterment for both an individual and the environment, answering the ***"Now What?"***