



Connecting Kids to Nature

We are a part of nature! Try this outdoor activity – it’s safe, fun, and educational. Project Learning Tree® activities build creative and critical thinking skills while helping children make connections between themselves and the world around them.

Take a Dip into Forest Bathing

Did you know that spending time in quiet contemplation near trees — **forest bathing** — can be an effective way to connect to nature, foster empathy, and reduce stress, depression, and anger? In fact, in some parts of the world forest bathing is an accepted, preventive medical practice called *forest therapy*, which has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve energy, sleep, immune response, and cardiovascular health.

In forest bathing, people are invited to participate in a series of activities while walking in a forested area with a guide. Although the practice varies, traditionally it begins with an introductory, pre-walk ceremony requesting the forest’s welcome, followed by a series of invitations from the forest, suggested by a guide or self-inspired, to join in several mindfulness activities. The walk ends with a reflection and tea ceremony. The tea is usually made from parts of a forest plant, respectfully and legally harvested along the way. During the walk, participants periodically form sharing circles to connect to each other and nature by voluntarily sharing their observations beginning with the phrase “I am noticing...”

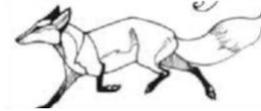
To give children an idea of what forest bathing is like, try the activities below at a nearby forest or tree-canopied park. Remember to follow all school and public safety and health guidelines.

1. Begin by having the children stand in a circle while doing some deep breathing: slowly inhaling for a count of four and then slowly exhaling for a count of four — all through the nose, repeat twice. Next, ask them to share something that they like about the forest around them starting with the phrase, “I like...” or “I am grateful for...” (e.g., *the warm breeze, scent of pine, puffy white clouds, cool shade, birds singing*). *Optional:* Share with the children that they are letting the forest know it is appreciated and that they are asking the forest to welcome them.

2. Walk farther into the forest and invite the children to participate in at least three of the following sequenced activities. After each activity, ask them to share an observation with the group.

- Hug a tree while paying attention to its width, height, and hardness. *Can you get your arms more than halfway around the trunk? Is the trunk warm or cold? What do you notice about the bark’s texture, color, and smell? Does it remind you of anything?*

- Silently do the “fox walk.” With feet pointing forward and knees slightly bent, step forward with one foot and lightly touch the outside ball of the foot to the ground, roll inward until the entire ball lightly touches the ground, next lower that heel lightly to the ground, finally roll forward putting your entire weight on that foot. Repeat with the other foot. Now, fox walk while pretending to look for prey and avoid predators. *How does your choice of where to step change? How does your speed change?*



Optional: carefully walk barefoot over different forest floor and trail areas. How does each area feel under your feet (e.g., smooth, rough, cold, dry, wet, slippery, squishy, prickly)?

- Quietly stand for a few minutes in one place while identifying as many things in the surrounding air as possible. *What do you notice? Is there anything floating in the air or dropping to the ground such as leaves, feathers, or water drops? Is there anything alive moving through the air such as bees, flies, butterflies, grasshoppers, or birds?*
- Watch for birds soaring above the trees. Open both arms out like wings and slowly move forward, soaring and turning like a bird for a minute or two. *What sensations do you feel? Do you believe that birds feel the same sensations?*
- Slowly spin around in a circle with eyes closed. Stop, open both eyes and focus on the closest plant. *What do you notice about that plant?* Now, imagine what that plant sees when looking back at you!
- Very quietly sit or lie in one spot by yourself for a while (*5 - 20 minutes depending on developmental level*) simply watching, listening, and feeling the surrounding forest environment.



3. End by having the children walk to an open area and sit in a circle. *Optional: Pass out cups of hot or iced tea made from store-bought, herbal tea bags with flavors similar to plants found in the forest, e.g., mint, chamomile, rose, or blackberry, being mindful of any allergies. Have the children reflect on their experiences and then ask them to state what they liked or to share their gratitude for something in the forest environment and how it made them feel (e.g., happy, silly, relaxed, like a forest plant or animal, connected, thoughtful, spiritual).*

PLT improves children’s environmental awareness, critical thinking skills, and academic performance.

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PreK-12 PLT activities, ideas, and materials.
- Encourage your child’s school to incorporate outdoor learning and PLT.
- Learn more at www.plt.org or call 202-765-3641

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