



Nature Connection

A Resource for Schools and Young People

Developed by Jasmine Dale as a Renew Wales 'Innovation Initiative'
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Nature connection is increasingly understood as an important part of a young person's education and development.

The wide-ranging benefits brought about through nature connection include:

- Improved physical and mental health
- Improved empathy for, and understanding of, ecosystems.
- An improved sense of 'eco-citizenship'.
- Empowerment to take action - rather than despair in the face of contemporary challenges.

However, for many teachers (as it is for our learners) nature connection is new territory. This resource aims to give teachers the confidence to plan and deliver nature connection sessions, with any group, of any age and ability, and through any part of the curriculum. It contains:

- 'Flow learning', around which any nature connection activity can be structured.
- Sample lesson plans, demonstrating how nature connection activities can be delivered in practice.
- A mapping of nature connection to the **four purposes** of the Curriculum for Wales.
- Links for further information and resources, for those wanting to find out more about nature connection.

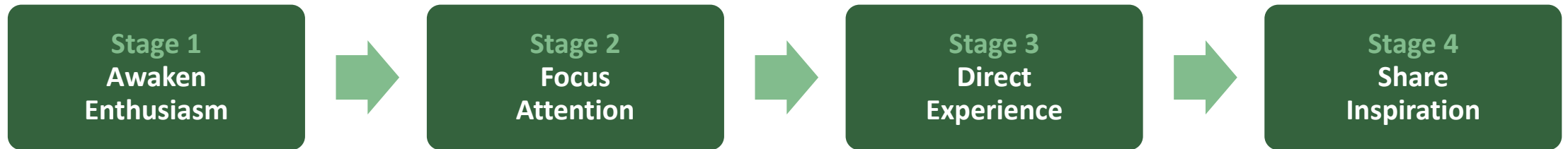
This resource was developed by Jasmine Dale, as a **Renew Wales** 'Innovation Initiative'. For more information, please contact info@renewwales.org.uk.



Flow Learning

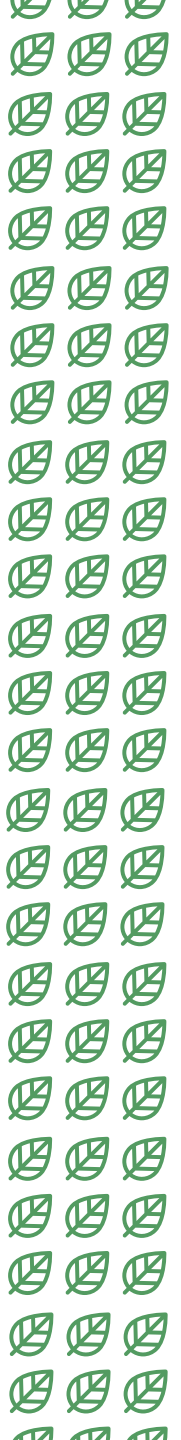
Flow Learning (developed by Joseph Cornell*) provides a simple framework around which you can design and structure your nature connection activities. It is a tried and tested process developed by experts in nature connection. You can meet young people where they are in terms of their interest and energy level, and then progress step-by-step towards more meaningful and profound nature experiences.

Activities are organised as part of a four stage process.



Flow Learning Process	Learning Outcomes / Purpose
STAGE ONE: AWAKEN ENTHUSIASM	
<p>Quality: Playfulness and Alertness</p> <p>Choose an activity to begin with that makes learning fun, instructive, and experiential, to establish a rapport between teacher, students, and subject. With enthusiasm, people learn a lot, creating conditions to have a meaningful experience of nature. Awakening enthusiasm activities can be anything that creates an intense flow of personal interest and alertness.</p> <p>Depending on the context and the spirit of your class, this could range from a humorous way of checking in on how everyone is feeling; a fun physical game; or a more extended light, engaging activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Builds on people’s love of play and creates an atmosphere of enthusiasm. ▪ A dynamic beginning gets everyone saying, “Yes, I like this!” ▪ Develops alertness and overcomes passivity. ▪ Creates involvement and positive group bonds. ▪ Minimises discipline problems. ▪ Develops rapport between participants, leader, and subject. ▪ Provides direction and structure, preparing for more sensitive activities.

* <https://www.sharingnature.com/flow-learning.html>



Flow Learning Process	Learning Outcomes / Purpose
STAGE 2: FOCUS ATTENTION	
<p>Quality: Receptivity and Concentration</p> <p>Choose an activity to help students become attentive and receptive to nature. Learning depends on focused attention, bringing students' enthusiasm toward a calm focus. If our thoughts are scattered, we can't be intensely aware of nature, nor of anything else.</p> <p>Suitable activities include sensory awareness, such as 'sound maps', detailed observation of patterns of petals, tree bark, wind etc., and acquiring information e.g. science experiments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increases attention span and concentration.▪ Deepens awareness by focusing attention.▪ Positively channels enthusiasm generated in Stage One.▪ Develops observational skills.▪ Calms the mind.▪ Develops receptivity for more sensitive nature experiences
STAGE 3: DIRECT EXPERIENCE	
<p>Quality: Connecting with Nature</p> <p>Choose an activity that is deeply absorbing (immersive) and facilitates a strong connection with an aspect of nature. This could be a quiet and personally meaningful task; learning a practical outdoor skill; a challenge that requires intuition, physical effort or completion in some way.</p> <p>Adapt this stage to suit your resources and interests. Ideas include a trek to a local beauty spot or up a nearby hill; whittling wood; basket weaving; collecting natural items and making 'land art', storytelling and cooking over a fire.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Fosters deeper learning and intuitive understanding.▪ Integrates connection between brain and body (motor skills).▪ Promotes personal revelation and artistic inspiration.▪ Awakens an enduring connection with some part of nature.▪ Conveys a sense of wholeness, wonder, empathy and harmony.▪ Sense of achievement and raised self esteem.▪ Practical skills and dexterity.
STAGE 4: SHARE INSPIRATION	
<p>Quality: Clarity and idealism</p> <p>Create a sense of completion and an uplifting atmosphere that models positive values such as integrity, empathy and self awareness. Reflecting and sharing with others strengthens and clarifies one's experience and brings to the surface unspoken but often universal feelings that—once communicated—allow people to feel a closer bond with the topic and with one another.</p> <p>Suitable activities include a 'go round', stating feelings and thoughts through gestures, words, funny noises etc; sharing work created in the session; small groups perform a creative finale relating to the topic explored.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Clarifies and strengthens personal experience and learning.▪ Increases learning and empathy by hearing others' reflection.▪ Builds on uplifted mood and leaves students resourced to go forward.▪ Promotes positive peer reinforcement, respect and group bonding.▪ Encourages positivity and altruistic behaviour.▪ Provides feedback for the teacher / leader.▪ Settles the students ready for going home, their next lesson etc.

Sample Lesson Plan 1 (2 hours)

Suitable for teachers and students new to nature activities and with access to an outdoor site or classroom.

Aims (this activity should ...)	Outcomes (by the end of this activity, young people should ...)
Encourage enthusiasm for being outdoors.	Have a greater appetite for outdoor activity.
Introduce sensory awareness through sound and touch.	Have experienced being still, listening and focusing.
Introduce observation skills.	Have observed diverse patterns in nature.
Develop trust and rapport.	Have improved confidence and self esteem

Time	Flow Learning	Method	Activity	Notes
15mins	Awaken enthusiasm	Game in pairs	3 Insect Duels* Pairs spread out, each round modelled by teacher and willing volunteer first.	Many suitable games (for examples see www.forestschoolnetwork.com)
15mins	Focus attention	Teacher leads; students work alone	Sound Maps With eyes closed, bring attention to the sounds around you. As you hear them make a mark or squiggle on the card. Focus on the sounds close by, gradually extending your range to the far distance (e.g. breathing, rustling to dogs, airplanes etc.).	Card and pens required and sensible place to sit.
45mins	Direct Experience	Work in pairs or alone. Option for teacher to frame with group discussion	Pattern observation** Students go and collect nature items and observe patterns in nature, such as clouds, the ground, vegetation etc. Use empty cardboard tinfoil rolls as microscopes (nature eyes) to encourage focus on details.	Have attractive images or objects in the centre that show patterns in nature (e.g. spirals in shells; branching of rivers, trees and veins; honeycomb; seeds and petals.).
30mins	Direct experience continued	In pairs	Meet a Tree: In pairs: one student is blindfolded with a scarf, whilst the other guides them to a tree. Without being able to see, the student uses touch to get a deep sense of the texture and scale of the tree. Students swap roles. Finish with seeing if you can identify your same tree with your eyes open.	If no trees available; alternative is to have bark or twigs in a box to feel and identify with eyes closed.
15mins	Share inspiration	Go round	In turn, everyone share what you most enjoyed about the session. Gather ideas for future activities.	NB tweak next session with this feedback

*Adapted from <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/three-irish-duels>

**Patterns are everywhere and universal and perform a function in ecosystems and society. There are numerous nature pattern resources online.

Sample Lesson Plan 2 (1.5 hours)

Suitable for teachers and students with some understanding of environmental issues and local solutions.

Aims (this activity should ...)	Outcomes (by the end of this activity, young people should ...)
Create a tangible vision for a bright future.	Have a sense of empowerment and positivity.
Provide opportunity to raise concerns for future.	Be able to offer pragmatic solutions to environmental concerns.
Share observation and sensory awareness techniques.	Have reduced eco-anxiety.
Provide opportunity for creative expression.	Have a stronger nature connection and sense of eco-citizenship.

Time	Flow Learning	Method	Activity	Notes
15mins	Awaken enthusiasm	Welcome, check in	Introduce session State how feeling today using the 'Thumbometer'.	Thumb up is "I feel good", ranging to thumb down "not happy today."
5mins	Focus attention	Teacher leads. Group summons imaginary 'time machine' to begin	Visualisation of a Bright Future (Use or adapt the script on page 3 of this document https://transitionnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Visioning-a-post-Transition-future.pdf).	Frame positively e.g. over 2 million groups worldwide work to protect nature; we have the solutions etc.
15mins	Focus attention continued	Teacher invites feedback	Feedback and discussion of what everybody saw or felt in their imagined future Help them identify the essence of their futures to anchor the experience. Reinforce positive imagery and sensory recollections by the students.	Address eco-anxiety with pragmatic solutions, such as local food growing and wildlife projects.
40mins	Direct Experience	Teacher leads, group input	Sensory activity and observation walk outdoors Model each sense, 'tuning' up the Bodyometer: the ground beneath our feet; air and temperature on our skin; 'deer ears'; scents; sounds and 'owl eyes'. Keep senses open on the walk and collect a nature item each on return to class.	Model the senses in class first. There are many online resources that engage the senses, e.g. from the wilderness awareness indigenous traditions.
15mins	Share inspiration	Go round	Closing circle Staying connected to senses, teacher and students present their nature item that represents the essence of their bright future.	This activity can be extended with an art exercise such as charcoal sketches of nature items, or painting of bright future.

Sample Lesson Plan 3 (1-1.5 hours)

Suitable as a rainy day activity, with scope to extend (for example, by incorporating an outdoor walk or art activity)

Aims (this activity should ...)	Outcomes (by the end of this activity, young people should ...)
Introduce bio-regions and natural resources.	Have an increased understanding of ecosystems and interconnectedness.
Encourage sensory awareness.	Have improved observation skills and reduce anxiety.
Improve vocabulary and articulation of feelings.	Have improved confidence and a sense of achievement.
Provide a safe space to express creativity and feelings.	Have improved presentation and communication skills.

Time	Flow of Learning	Method	Activity	Notes
5mins	Awaken enthusiasm	Welcome, check in	Bio-regional energiser game Point to, or run to different corners of a hall, to where is the nearest tree, river, sunrise, food garden, coast, woods etc.	Can be made more complex and build on science and geography curricula.
10mins	Focus attention	Teacher leads	Nature poem and observation Read a nature poem whilst students focus on texture, colour, smell and shape of nature items on each table. Allow them to touch and smell the objects.	Encourage the students to focus on the nature items rather than the poem. Use diverse objects such as lichen, shells, leaves, flowers and stones.
15-30mins	Direct Experience	Teacher leads, students work independently	Creative writing activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 3 pieces of card, students write the 3 main words that describe the nature item they focused on, and / or can include words evoked by howling weather outside or seen through a window. On another piece of card, each student connects the 3 words to make a sentence, using as few joining words as possible (e.g. howl, soft, spiky might become 'The soft howl in me is spiky.'). 	The ideal outcome is haiku style poems. Use coloured pens and good quality paper or card. (N.B. do not tell the students they are writing a poem in advance!)
15-30mins	Share inspiration	Group work	Poem writing In small groups combine the individual sentences to create a haiku style poem. Encourage students to move the cards around for best effect, and practice reading out the finished piece.	Groups of 4 work well for a finished poem that has rhythm and style. Those who finish early can sketch the natural objects.
15mins	Share inspiration continued.	Whole class	Poem presentation Each group presents their poem to the whole class; allow for any improvisation and wild ideas to be included. Encourage clear presenting.	Extension activities include making a short play out of the poems / words, or displaying them artistically.



The Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales

Nature connection activities are well aligned with the **‘four purposes’** of the Curriculum for Wales, in particular those highlighted below.

ambitious, capable learners who:

- set themselves high standards and seek and enjoy challenge
- ✓ are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts
- ✓ are questioning and enjoy solving problems
- ✓ can communicate effectively in different forms and settings, using both Welsh and English
- ✓ can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about
- can use number effectively in different contexts
- understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts
- use digital technologies creatively to communicate, find and analyse information
- undertake research and evaluate critically what they find

and are ready to learn throughout their lives

ethical, informed citizens who:

- find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views
- ✓ engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values
- understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights
- ✓ understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting
- ✓ are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past
- respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society
- ✓ show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet

and are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world

enterprising, creative contributors who:

- ✓ connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products
- ✓ think creatively to reframe and solve problems
- identify and grasp opportunities
- take measured risks
- ✓ lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly
- ✓ express ideas and emotions through different media
- give of their energy and skills so that other people will benefit

and are ready to play a full part in life and work

healthy, confident individuals who:

- have secure values and are establishing their spiritual and ethical beliefs
- ✓ are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy
- ✓ apply knowledge about the impact of diet and exercise on physical and mental health in their daily lives
- know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well
- ✓ take part in physical activity
- take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk
- ✓ have the confidence to participate in performance
- ✓ form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect
- ✓ face and overcome challenge
- have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can

and are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.



Further Reading

There are thousands of nature connection activities online that are designed to be suitable for a wide range of participants and can be adapted to suit different needs, ages and contexts. Here are some from well known organisations:

- <https://www.sharingnature.com/nature-activities.html>
- <https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/activities>
- <https://ukforestschoools.com/>
- <https://www.wildernessawareness.org/>
- <https://kidsofthewild.co.uk/category/wildlife-nature-connection-ideas-family-kids-children/connect-with-nature-kids-need-nature-connection/>
- <https://theimaginationtree.com/60-nature-play-ideas-for-kids/>
- <https://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/vision/>
- <https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/about/>

