

Belly Botany

Big Ideas: Diversity, Place

Diversity is essential to healthy natural and social systems. Often, we can't see how diverse our community is until we take a closer look. This activity gets students down on the ground to take an "ant's view" look at the biodiversity at our feet. Belly Botany connects essential skills of observation and mapping to developing a sense of place.

Essential Questions:

- How does the diversity of a system affect its health?
- How does where we live impact how we live? How does how we live impact where we live?

You will need:

Hula hoops or circles of string
Paper and pencils
Clipboards
Optional: magnifying glasses

Participants: This activity works well in pairs or groups of 3.

Space: Step outside of the classroom for this activity! Find any area where your students can safely crouch down and get a good look at what's on the ground. The sidewalk, a tree pit, a garden bed, playground, park, field or forest would work well.

Activity:

1. After walking the group to the outdoor area in focus, establish areas of investigation for each pair or small group of students by laying down a hula hoop or a circle of string.
2. Students should take 3 – 5 minutes to do an initial observation of everything living and non-living within that circumscribed space.
3. Using the pencils, clipboard and paper, the students will draw a diversity map of all they find within that circle.

Debrief:

Gallery Walk—One quick way of sharing this work and carrying the outside world back into the classroom is with a gallery walk. Post each group's map on the walls around the classroom and encourage the students to look deeply at the living and non-living things within each map.

Discussion:

1. What surprised you about your diversity map?
2. What similarities do all of the maps share? What are the differences?
3. What do your findings say about the health of the area?
4. What do the maps tell us about how humans use this place?
5. What could we do to increase the diversity of this place?

Variations:

- Adjust the area in focus depending on the skill level of your students and the time frame you have. A larger circle of space will take more time to investigate.
- Repeat this activity in different ecosystems. Then compare the maps of the two spaces.
- Revisit the area with the “eye’s of an eagle,” looking at the same space from a new perspective.
- Try this activity during different seasons or in varying weather conditions.

Inspired by: *Connecting People to Place: A Compendium of Techniques For Getting to Know Your Place* by Pat Straughan