

July 2023

A Special Place

Tallgrass Prairie Center, University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©Tallgrass Prairie Center, University of Northern Iowa

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/oermaterials>

Recommended Citation

Tallgrass Prairie Center, University of Northern Iowa, "A Special Place" (2023). *Open Educational Resources*. 343.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/oermaterials/343>

This Lesson Plans is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Educational Resources at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Educational Resources by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

A Special Place

Adapted from Keepers of the Earth

* Educators please refer to **New to Nature** for information on becoming comfortable teaching through the outdoors

Overall Activity

Visit with your class a natural place several times, using a variety of senses or intellectual stimulations (refer to Procedure for further instructions). Keep records of these visits in some way that best fits your students (journal, iPad, pictures, etc.) and extend or share your experiences with others.

Grade Range and Relevant Iowa Standards: K - 2nd

- K-LS1-1. Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive (Kindergarten)
- 1-LS3-1. Make observations to construct an evidence-based account that young plants and animals are like, but not exactly like, their parents
- 2-LS4-1. Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.

Goals/Objectives:

- Developing connections and relationships with a natural environment
- Enhancing sensory perceptions and awareness skills
- Understanding and recording observations of the importance of organic life

Materials:

- An outdoor area near school such as a wetland, field/prairie, or woodlands
- Optional: Journals, magnifying glasses, clipboards, litter cleanup bags, pencils/paper, paint, crayons, plant field guides, collection boxes, technology, water, first aid kit

Procedure:

1. Find a natural area (preferably quiet) that your class can visit and re-visit periodically. During your first visit to this area each child will pick a special spot for themselves. Have them sit quietly for 5-10 minutes (or longer).
 1. It may help to take a walk through this area first and have them make mental notes of what they see, are comfortable, and less restlessness occurs once their special spot has been chosen
2. Regroup as a whole with your class and have students share an experience from their locations.
3. For each repeated visit to this area, consider having students bring a natural gift to their special spot such as a leaf, soil, a berry, etc.

Suggested activities or sensory experiences in their spots (consider using these as choices for your students):

1. Become an insect. Lie on your stomach as close to the ground as possible. What does it look like, feel like, sound like, smell like? While outside or back in the classroom draw a picture or write a short description of this experience.
2. Pretend as if you are part of the nature around you and one with it while sitting upright. If you move, do it very slowly. Children may find insects or animals come closer to them.
3. Pick a plant growing near you and study it carefully with all senses, not merely sight. Could be a tree or a single blade of grass.
4. Write a poem of your area using your senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and hearing.
5. Lie down. Close your eyes and only use hearing/sounds to make observations of your experience.
6. Draw a picture of your place. If a student does not see insects, animals, and is disappointed simply remind them to think about what may be there when they are NOT. Use their imagination to add animals into the natural habitat of their space/drawing.

7. Visit at different times if possible and take pictures of each student in their special space. Make a classroom board showcasing your students' connection to nature.
8. After all the visits have been made, have your students create stories, songs, plays, or reports from their collections and memories.

Extensions:

- Refer to **Iowa's Nature Series** for additional resources on the diversity of Iowa's landscape, from vertebrates & plants to state symbols & prairies
- It isn't necessary to re-visit the initial area repeatedly but will greatly assist in cultivating a sense of place, community, and connectedness to nature and each other
- If time and geography allows, repeat this activity with multiple different locations so that children can see the variability and biodiversity of their natural areas (this will scaffold to older children and Iowa State Standards)
- Encourage your students to do this on their own and care for their special natural environment near their homes. Assign a special project in this vein that perhaps can take the place of a task that is difficult for them to accomplish in the classroom (Differentiation)
- Collections, drawings, poetry, journals, etc. can be displayed alongside photos of students in their spaces

Prairie Connections (some information sourced from Iowa's Nature Series):

- Check out the wildflower **Teacher Resource** page from the U.S. Forest Service filled with other activities & species biodiversity pages
- To find a prairie location near you: **Iowa Prairie Network**
- **Nature Journaling** lesson from the Fish & Wildlife Service & the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center with options, extensions, and other field activity ideas for journaling categorized by grade level
- The ecosystem that is prairie and the plants that grow within it create the fertile soils that are the basis of Iowa's economy. Throughout history people have relied on these diverse plants and the wildlife they support for food and medicines. Prairie ecosystems are used by grassland-adapted animals as a critical habitat and these organisms contribute to sustaining the biodiversity present in these special areas across Iowa.