



Schools Tree Day – Growing Grit – Primary

Teacher preparation

Learning Intentions:

- Students will understand what grit is.
- Students will know about the benefits of time in nature.
- Students will understand how to set S.M.A.R.T. goals to achieve positive outcomes.



Success Criteria:

Students can...

- ...identify examples of gritty behaviour.
- ...draw a picture that shows them in nature.
- ...set a S.M.A.R.T. goal to increase the time they spend in nature.

Growing Grit

This lesson introduces the concept of grit and explores some of the benefits of and ways to develop this character trait. Find out more about grit, and other character strengths at [Character Lab](#).

Grit: the power of passion and perseverance | Angela Lee Duckworth | TED (<https://youtu.be/H14bBuluwB8>)



What are the links between time outdoors and grit? It could be said that many people use time outdoors and connection with nature as a strategy for coping with setbacks and persevering to achieve their goals. Time outdoors and in nature is a great way to recharge, rejuvenate and find inspiration to pursue our passions in a gritty way.

Planet Ark Schools Tree Day provides a great opportunity for you to take you class outside.

[Click here to read Planet Ark's 2017 Research Report: *Learning from Trees: Life Lessons for Future Generations*](#). You will also find the Key Findings report and the "What can Nature Teach Us" two-minute video.

[Click here to download the Planet Ark Think Outside the Box - Outdoor Learning Can Grow So Much Poster](#), and display it in your staffroom.

A report titled [Adding Trees - A Prescription for Health, Happiness and Fulfilment](#), found:

- Just 10 minutes' relaxing outside is enough to significantly reduce blood pressure.
- Time in nature reduces a person's chance of developing a range of diseases, including diabetes by 43%, cardiovascular disease and stroke by 37% and depression by 25%.
- Nature induces positive feelings through a number of physiological mechanisms, including activating the brain's dopamine reward system.
- Students who take part in outdoor learning programs perform better in reading, writing, maths and science, with 77% of teachers reporting student improvement in standardised tests.
- A strong connection to nature makes people more likely to feel passionate about relationships with their friends and family.

Read more about the intellectual, psychological, physical and mental health benefits of contact with nature for children here: [Planting Trees: Just What the Doctor Ordered Research Report](#)



Benefits of Learning Outdoors

Steve Parish talks about National Tree Day
(<https://youtu.be/Cux6TKh6WJE>)

- [Tips for making outdoor learning easier.](#)
- [Why teach outdoors?](#)

Teaching sequence

Work through this resource material in the following sequence:

20 minutes – Part A: Exploring the Effects of Nature

10 minutes – Part B: Understanding the Benefits of Nature

10 minutes – Part C: Setting a S.M.A.R.T. Goal to Spend More Time in Nature

10 minutes – Reflection

Part A: Exploring the Effects of Nature

TAKE STUDENTS OUTSIDE FOR THIS LESSON.
BEFORE LEAVING THE CLASSROOM, ASK STUDENTS TO BRING A BOOK
OR CLIPBOARD TO WRITE ON.

Step 1. This simple activity is designed to encourage students to closely observe nature and connect with their local school environment. It helps calm and focus students, particularly in times of restlessness.

Take students outside to a natural area within the school grounds. Ask students to spend some time walking slowly through and observing the natural environment, quietly using their senses for 5 or 10 minutes. After the allotted time ask students to form a large circle. Invite students to share a reflection, one at a time, on how they felt before the



activity and how they felt after. Was there a difference?

Note: If faced with time constraints, students could turn to the person next to them to share their reflection.

Step 2. While still outdoors, link students' experience in Step 1 with their more general experiences in nature by asking them to sit in a place that is comfortable, think about and draw a time when they were in nature and how they felt while they were having that experience. Time in nature involves time spent outdoors – for example: walking the dog, going to the beach, going for a bush walk, spending time playing at a park, observing animals such as birds and insects in the school playground or participating in nature-care events such as Schools Tree Day. Give each student a blank piece of paper and make pencils and textas available. Inform students that they have 15 minutes to create a basic drawing that shows where they were and how they felt during the experience.

Step 3. Once students have finished their drawings, ask them to form groups of 3-4 and share what they have created. Ensure that students share what they have drawn about the way they feel in the picture.

Step 4. Ask some volunteers to share their picture with the class, and reinforce any positive reflections students share about spending time in nature.

Part B: Understanding the Benefits of Nature

Step 1. While still outdoors, ask students to gather closer to you and inform them that you will now share some information from a research report by Planet Ark called “Planting trees: just what the doctor ordered”. The report confirms that it is beneficial for people to spend time in nature. While you are sharing the information, ensure that you ask students to indicate if they can relate to what they are hearing, and invite volunteers to share their personal anecdotes.

Research conducted by Planet Ark has found that contact with nature



creates the following:

- Increased feelings of joy and happiness
- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Improved memory, focus, problem solving and creativity
- Improved behaviour and co-operation skills
- Enhanced academic success and achievement
- Increased physical health, coordination and eyesight
- Increased connection with our earth giving students a sense of wonder and curiosity
- Increased likelihood to care for and conserve nature as adults

Step 2. Ask students to indicate, using thumbs up (agree), thumbs sideways (unsure) or thumbs down (disagree), their view on the following statement:

“There are many benefits to spending time in nature.”

Part C: Setting a S.M.A.R.T. Goal to Spend More Time in Nature

Step 1. Remaining in the outdoor setting, ask students if they have ever heard of grit or being gritty. If they have, ask them to share what they understand about grit in a quick class sharing session. Summarise the discussion by explaining that grit can be defined as ‘perseverance and passion for long-term goals.’

Step 2. Explain to students that setting a goal is one part of being gritty – it helps us to remember why we try and why we persevere when things get tough. Setting a goal is a way to make positive changes in our lives. Explain to students that for the rest of the lesson, they will set a goal that will help them to spend more time in nature so that they can experience the benefits they learnt about in Part B of the lesson.

Step 3. Distribute a copy of the [S.M.A.R.T goal template](#) to each student, and read through each of the criteria as a class. Encourage students to ask clarifying questions, or to write them down and ask after each point has been read through.



Step 4. Encourage students to move to a space on their own, and to observe the space that they are in and seek inspiration from the outdoor setting. Students should then think about and write down a personal goal that will help them to spend more time in nature in the space at the top of the S.M.A.R.T. goal template. For example:

- I will spend 10 minutes each day sitting under my favourite tree in the schoolyard and observe the birds that live in it.
- I will walk our dog three times a week for 30 minutes.
- I will take a notebook into our backyard once a week for 30 minutes and write down what I observe.
- I will spend one hour a week at the local skate-park.
- I will participate in Tree Day each year.

Step 5. Once students have set their goal, ask them to apply the S.M.A.R.T. criteria to it. The guide asks them to apply each of the criteria to their goal and outline how they will work to overcome any setbacks or frustrations that they may face while pursuing their goal. Inform students that they may need to adjust their goal to ensure that it meets the S.M.A.R.T. criteria and is not too broad.

Step 6. Ask students to share their goals in a class discussion, and foreshadow that you will be asking them about their goal to spend time in nature at the end of each week to find out about their progress, as well as any of the benefits they are experiencing by spending more time in nature.

Reflection

Ask students to respond to the following questions on the Student Worksheet:

- What was the easiest thing about setting a S.M.A.R.T. goal?
- What was the most difficult thing about setting a S.M.A.R.T. goal?
- In your opinion, is setting a S.M.A.R.T. goal helpful? Why?
- Write down one thing that might stop you from achieving your



goal to spend more time in nature, and what you can do to persevere.

Get involved in Schools Tree Day

Get your students outside in nature for Planet Ark Schools Tree Day - the largest nature- care event in Australia!

- Click [here](#) for more information and to register your school for Schools Tree Day.
- Find more Schools Tree Day lessons [here](#).
- Find a lesson on how to plant, and care for a seedlings [here](#)!
- Find more outdoor learning lessons [here](#).

Differentiated Learning

Extension: Encourage students to write a reflection at the end of each week that details their goal to spend more time in nature, any setback they have experienced, how they have worked to overcome the setback and the benefits they are experiencing from pursuing their goal.

Encourage students to share their S.M.A.R.T. goal with their family to encourage them to spend more time in nature.

Provisions for learning support: Encourage students to set their goal by thinking about what they do in their day-to-day lives, and substituting one thing in their routine for an outdoor activity.

Before heading outdoors for this lesson, foreshadow that you will be doing so with students who require time to adjust to changes in routine.

Teacher Reflection

Take this opportunity to reflect on your own teaching:



- What did you learn about your teaching today?
- What worked well?
- What didn't work so well?
- What would you share?
- Where to next?
- How are you going to get there?