



The Arboretum for Educators

Resources for Teachers, Students, and Families

September 2024

Getting Started Teaching Outdoors



Include more outdoor teaching and learning for your students this new school year. September is a great time to begin establishing routines and expectations for outdoor learning in the same ways that you do for indoor learning. Use the first 6 weeks of school as you get to know the students to introduce weekly outings to your schoolyard or outdoor classroom. Time outside can be a powerful community builder and allows you to observe children and notice their strengths and interests. This is a good opportunity to begin bringing the

outdoors in as well.

[Check out these tips](#) for practical advice for all ages. More tips for [teaching middle and high school students outside](#).

PreK-2nd grade: First Activities

Great first activities for young children include Searches and Hunts. For example, give children a different color marker and have them find something outdoors that matches their color. Then they can use that marker to make an observational drawing of the object. When leaves begin to fall, students can hunt for specific leaf shapes or leaf sizes – bigger than your hand, or heart-shaped help children focus on attributes. Make class collections – leaves, acorns, pebbles, or twigs – and encourage children to sort these collections in multiple ways. [Find more ideas here](#).

Grades 3-5: Writing and Math

Build in writing and the use of nature journals into every outdoor session. Students can choose or be [assigned a Sit Spot](#) for the entire month and record their observations and investigations quietly for 10 minutes. You can vary having students start with quiet observation and recording or end with sense-making after an investigation. [Support your math lessons with natural materials](#) – have students demonstrate multiplication concepts with acorns or leaves, create pictorial graphs of data, find examples of symmetry in nature, perform all sorts of measurements, create scale maps of the playground, etc. Bring out chalk and have students work on the hardscape instead of a worksheet!

Middle School: Co-Creating an Outdoor Space

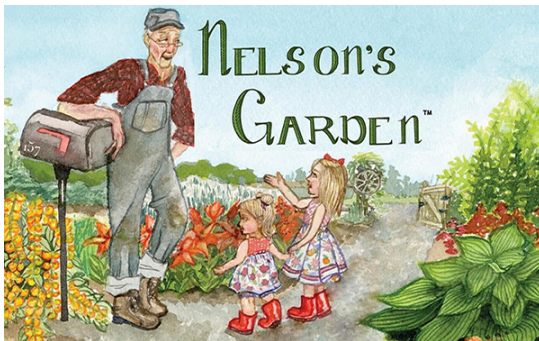
First outdoor experiences for middle school students can center on team building using fun engineering and design projects. Bring them outdoors to evaluate and map the learning space and discuss how to make it more friendly to living things and increase biodiversity. Involve them in problem-solving to take ownership of their outdoor classroom. Build [insect hotels](#); plant bulbs in different areas of the yard; build [solar water distilling machines](#) and [solar ovens](#) to investigate sunny and shady areas; create and post Outdoor Agreements.

The goal is to make the students invested in their outdoor spaces and use it for meaningful learning throughout the year.

High School: Using Technology

The middle school suggestions above are equally useful for high school students during their first forays into outdoor learning. If you allow them access to their phones, the following free apps are recommended for documenting what is in your schoolyard: [iNaturalist](#), [PlantNet](#), [Picture This](#), and [Merlin Bird ID](#). Students can practice with these apps as they also learn the routines and expectations of outdoor learning. Why not encourage a [digital journal](#)? Students can take photos, record sound, and add sketches and labels to their nature discoveries.

EXTRA!



Nelson's Garden

Sunday, Sept 8

2-4pm Leventritt Pavillion

FREE

Celebrate the last of the summer with an author book reading of *Nelson's Garden* and participate in a garden mural coloring project, while enjoying the beauty of our Shrub and Vine Garden.

[Learn More and Register](#)

Teaching Environmental Humanities through Landscape Architecture Workshops in 2025

These design-centered workshops presented by the American Society of Landscape Architects will provide an instructional framework that reflects the interdisciplinary research and work of environmental studies emerging within

the humanities. 72 K-12 educators will be selected from around the country to attend in Washington, DC.

[Learn More](#)



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