

Lesson 1: What Did Your Parents do Outside?

Grade 7 English Language Arts

LESSON DESCRIPTION: This short lesson is the anticipatory set for the entire 7th grade Take the Challenge unit. The unit focuses on the disconnect from nature that is a growing phenomenon among young people. Teacher stories of experiences in the natural world set the stage for interviewing parents about such experiences. Enthusiasm for connecting with nature builds through a class discussion. The closure activity introduces Richard Louv, a man who has thought and written about connecting with nature.

FOCUS QUESTIONS: How do you gather oral information? What kinds of experiences did parents have? How have outdoor experiences changed?

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

- listen to the teacher’s stories about childhood experiences in nature.
- formulate interview questions.
- interview their parents or grandparents.
- share and discuss interview results.
- optional – compare their experiences with their parents’ experiences.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**
 - * **CCSS.7.SL.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
 - * **CCSS.7.SL.2** Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.
 - * **CCSS.7.L.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing speaking, reading or listening.
 - a. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.

LENGTH OF LESSON: On day one, Activities 1 and 2 take twenty minutes each. On day two, plan on a whole class period for Activity 3.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Paper and pens for students.

VOCABULARY: As you tell your story, there may be vocabulary words to introduce. Words may also arise as students share interview results.

INVOLVING FAMILIES/COMMUNITIES: Students will hear stories about classmates families.

PROCEDURES

Activity 1: Students will listen to an adult's description of outdoor experiences.

1. Tell students about two or three experiences that you had in the natural world as a child. As you prepare these stories, think about how you would like students to tell stories and what makes stories engaging. Talk about a time you were overwhelmed by beauty, a time you did something exciting or scary, a place you loved to go, or something fun you did with other people. Somewhere in your story, explain why this was better than watching television or playing a video game. If time allows, ask for a couple of volunteers to tell about an experience in the natural world.

Activity 2: Students will formulate three class interview questions and conduct an interview with their parents.

1. Tell students that they are going to learn about the past and their families by conducting interviews. To gather information through an interview, you need to have interview questions. These will be short interviews, so there will only be three questions.
2. Brainstorm questions that will help them gather information. Remind them that this is the beginning of the Take the Challenge unit, so one of the questions should be about watching television versus spending time outdoors. Try to get questions that are about doing something in the natural world rather than just doing something outside, like jumping rope or playing baseball. Narrow all of the suggested questions to three. Alternatively, give the students three questions to use. These questions could be: What is your favorite memory of an experience you had in the woods as a child? When you were a child, what did you play when you played outdoors? Tell me about something you did with Grandma/Grandpa in the natural world as a child. Tell about a time when doing something outdoors was better than watching television.
3. Explain the homework: Students should interview an adult, preferably a parent or grandparent, by asking the three questions. They should take a few notes to help them remember details when they share the stories.

Activity 3: Students will share and discuss their findings from the interview.

1. Hold a class discussion about spending time in nature, based on interview findings. Try to connect the stories they tell with their own experiences. Highlight any comments made about television. Take all stories as a way to generate enthusiasm and interest in this unit.

Activity 4 (optional): Students will compare their experiences with their parents' experiences.

1. Ask students to answer the three interview questions in writing using their own experiences.
2. Have students make a Venn diagram on a sheet of paper. The left circle should be labeled My Parent's Experiences and the right circle should be labeled My Experiences. Use the Venn diagram to find similarities and differences. Discuss: What has caused differences?

Activity 5: Closure (and anticipatory set for Lesson 2)

1. Tell students that they are going to learn more about a man named Richard Louv and his ideas about the importance of connecting with nature. He wrote a book, *Last Child in the Woods*. Here is how his book starts:

One evening when my boys were younger, Matthew, then ten, looked at me from across a restaurant table and said quite seriously, "Dad, how come it was more fun when you were a kid?"

I asked what he meant.

Well, you're always talking about your woods and tree houses, and how you used to ride that horse down near the swamp."

At first, I thought he was irritated with me. I had, in fact, been telling him what it was like to use string and pieces of liver to catch crawdads in a creek, something I'd be hard-pressed to find a child doing these days. Like many parents, I do tend to romanticize my own childhood- and, I fear, too readily discount my children's experiences of play and adventure. But my son was serious; he felt he had missed out on something important.

He was right. Americans around my age, baby boomers or older, enjoyed a kind of free, natural play that seems, in the era of kid pagers, instant messaging, and Nintendo, like a quaint artifact.

Within the space of a few decades, the way children understand and experience nature has changed radically. The polarity of the relationship has reversed. Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment – but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading. That's exactly the opposite of how it was when I was a child.