# Nature Walk for Environmental Connection

**Class size:** 5-30 students

**Level:** All levels

**Time:** 50-60 minutes total

**Class setup:** Outdoor space (campus grounds, nearby park, courtyard) for the entire session

**Materials needed:** Notebooks/phones for recording, optional clipboards

## How This Embodies Teaching Otherwise

This practice grounds students in their immediate environment, helping them feel connected to the natural world that sustainability efforts aim to protect. It embodies care as curriculum by fostering care for place and environment through direct experience. It demonstrates criticality as method by moving beyond abstract sustainability concepts to felt, embodied understanding. It activates collective imagination as essential work by helping students envision their role in caring for the world around them.

This challenges the disconnect between abstract sustainability discussions and lived experience. Students develop personal connection to why sustainability matters through direct relationship with their environment, rather than just intellectual understanding of concepts.

## Step-by-Step Instructions

### Step 1: Intention Setting (5 minutes)

Begin outdoors in your chosen space. Explain that you're spending the entire session outside to connect with the environment that sustainability is actually about, rather than just talking about environmental issues abstractly. Give students the observation prompts; consider providing these as handouts for easy reference. Establish clear physical boundaries for the session, pointing out the furthest distances students should wander, any areas that are off-limits, and where you'll reconvene.

**Questions you might ask:**

- What do you notice about how you feel being in this space?
- What draws your attention or feels important to you?

- What do you want to protect or take care of here?
- What makes you feel connected to this place?

## Step 2: Silent Observation Walk (20 minutes)

Explain that you'll be walking and observing without talking for the next 20 minutes. This is about noticing what we miss when we're managing conversation. Ask them to walk slowly and observe what draws their attention, how being in this space feels, what they notice when they slow down, and what makes them feel connected or disconnected. Students should record observations through notes, sketches, or photos. Emphasise this is individual reflection time.

Walk slowly yourself and model the reflective pace. If students start chatting, approach quietly and gesture toward your notes to remind them without disrupting others. Position yourself where you can see most students but avoid hovering. When students say they don't know what to write, acknowledge that not knowing is valuable information. What does it feel like to not know what to write? What are they seeing that doesn't have words yet?

## Step 3: Connection Making (15 minutes)

Still outdoors, students reflect on their relationship to this place. Frame this as moving from observation to connection. They've gathered information through their senses; now, what does it mean? Allow time for genuine reflection as this can't be rushed. This isn't about forcing connections but noticing what emerges naturally. When students say they don't feel anything special, treat this as valuable information. What does it tell them about their relationship to this kind of environment? When students seem frustrated by the lack of immediate insight, remind them you're gathering information about how place affects thinking, not looking for perfect answers.

**Questions you might ask:**

- How does being here make you feel about environmental issues?
- What do you care about protecting in this space?
- How does experiencing this place change how you think about sustainability?
- What responsibility do you feel toward this environment?

## Step 4: Place-Based Sharing (15 minutes)

Find outdoor seating and form groups of 4-5 people using whatever method feels natural to your context. In small groups, students share how being in this place affected their feelings about environmental issues, what they felt drawn to protect or care for, and how this experience connects to their understanding of why sustainability matters. Move between groups, listening for insights that wouldn't have emerged from classroom discussion alone. Don't interrupt their conversations, but note themes for the final reflection. Give groups enough time for everyone to share fully, roughly 3 minutes each person, and provide a gentle warning before you'll reconvene. When groups finish early, invite them to look around this space together and notice what they see as a group that they missed individually.

## Step 5: Integration (5 minutes)

Staying outdoors, bring the whole group together and ask what spending the entire session in this place offered that staying in a classroom wouldn't. Don't over-analyse, simply acknowledge that place matters for understanding why we care about environmental issues. Listen for insights about the relationship between physical environment and thinking, any shifts in how students relate to sustainability concepts, and unexpected connections they've made.

**Questions you might ask:**

- What surprised you about your own responses today?
- How might this experience inform how you approach environmental issues in your professional life?
- What would you want to remember from today when you're back in traditional learning spaces?

## What to Expect

**Initial resistance:** Some students may feel this isn't "serious" academic work. Frame it as changing perspective to gain new insights.

**Gradual engagement:** Once outside, students typically become more observant and reflective. The change of environment often shifts energy and thinking.

**Unexpected connections:** Students frequently make connections they wouldn't have found through traditional discussion - nature provides powerful metaphors for complex concepts.

**Deeper questions:** Being in a different environment often generates questions that classroom thinking misses.

## Common Issues and Fixes

**"This feels unstructured"**

Response: "Sometimes our best thinking happens when we're not trying to control it. What are you noticing that you might have missed if we stayed inside?"

**"I don't see any connections to our topic"**

Response: "That's fine. Sometimes the value is in the noticing itself. What are you observing that interests you?"

**Weather concerns**

Response: Different weather creates different learning opportunities. Light rain, wind, or cold can generate insights about resilience, adaptation, or working with challenging conditions.

**Urban environment with limited nature**

Response: Urban spaces teach about systems, adaptation, coexistence, and human-nature relationships. Car parks, building interactions, and small plant life all offer learning opportunities.

## Quick Adaptations

**Online:** Students take individual walks in their own environments and share observations via video call

**Limited mobility:** Adapt to accessible outdoor spaces, or bring natural elements indoors (plants, stones, water)

**No outdoor access:** Use large windows, indoor plants, or even observe the classroom environment with fresh eyes

**Short sessions:** Reduce to 20 minutes total - 10 minutes outside, 10 minutes reflection

**Large groups:** Multiple smaller groups in different outdoor spaces, then compare experiences

**Winter/challenging weather:** Embrace the conditions as part of the learning - what do difficult conditions teach about your topic?

## Success Indicators

- Students become more observant and present during outdoor time
- Connections emerge between place-based observations and academic concepts
- Questions arise that wouldn't have surfaced in classroom discussion
- Students express surprise at insights gained from changing environment
- Conversations become more metaphorical and creative
- Students request similar outdoor learning experiences

This practice demonstrates that learning happens everywhere and that changing our physical context can shift our thinking about complex concepts. Students discover that their environment is a teacher and that academic thinking benefits from embodied experience in place.