

Practicing Reciprocity with Nature Ornaments

Materials Needed:

- Recycled containers from margarine, yogurt, etc.
- Water
- String/Twine
- Buckets/bags for collecting nature material
- Nature materials
- Bird seed and/or dried fruit

Scaffolding Options

This lesson can be scaffolding up and down to better suit the needs of you students.

Scaffold up:

- Try further engaging students in the idea of reciprocity

Scaffold down:

- Focus more heavily on season changes and the needs of animals throughout winter and spring.

Teaching Reciprocity

As Canadians, unsustainable relationships to Nature are deeply imbedded in our daily lives and systems. We often take from Nature without giving back. We consume resources, pollute the environment, and disrupt ecosystems for our own benefit. This thinking contributes to a disconnect from the Land and has profound impacts on the future of the planet and the well-being of all living things on it.

To combat this disconnect, we must adopt a mindset of reciprocity with Nature. Reciprocity is a long-established practice within many Indigenous Knowledge Systems and stresses the importance of mutual exchange and benefit. It means we give back to the environment as much as we take from it. It may include being aware of how our actions affect the world around us and taking meaningful action to improve your impact on the Earth. It can also include offering a gift to the Earth or learning ways in which you can give back. In this lesson, students will engage in reciprocal actions and offer the birds and critters living around their schoolyard food and building materials for spring nests!

Sharing Circle of Hope

Invite your students to join in a sharing circle together. As the seasons change, our mindset and wellbeing can change too. It's easy to begin feeling down as the days get darker and the cold creeps in. Encourage your students to share what they know about the seasons changing. How do they feel about it? How do they think the animals are doing with the seasonal change?

Engage in a conversation about what we can do to take care of ourselves during this time. What can we do to take care of the Earth?

Touch on reciprocity: What does the Earth do for us? What can we do for it?

Instructions

Step 1: Discussion

With your students, discuss and brainstorm:

1. **What is the first thing birds do once winter is over?**
 - They start building their nests
2. **What birds use to make nests**
 - Grasses, leaves, pine needles, twigs, bark strips, cattail down, lichen, etc.
3. **What birds eat during winter and spring**
 - Leftover tree fruits like cherries, crab apples, and berries. Bird seed has things like black sunflower seeds, millet, but local birds also eat leftover seeds from prairie plants.
4. **How does litter effect birds and how they make their homes and find food?**
 - Plastic can fill birds stomachs and they can't eat any food and they starve
 - Some birds end up using plastic as a nesting material and it can injure or trap fragile chicks
 - Birds can get tangled in plastics or litter
 - Plastic can contain toxic chemicals that harm birds

Step 4: Hang the ornaments

Hang the ornaments on a tree or fence outside and keep an eye out for any critters trying to get what's inside.

Keep in mind that critters may not use your ornaments during winter but once spring comes, the material and food inside will help birds and squirrels adjust to the new season!

Step 2: Collection

Get outside with your class and collect nature items that birds would use to build their nests.

Step 3: Create the ornament

In small containers, lay out the items and birdseeds.

Add half an inch of water to the container

Using a 6-inch string tied together, place part of it in the water so when it freezes, the string will be held in place and can be hung on a tree

Place containers outdoors overnight or on a cookie sheet in the freezer.

