

E.T. - A LOCAL WAY OF LEARNING

Title: OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

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Grade Level: All grades and adults

Concepts:
1. The Sun
2. Ecosystem
3. Carrying Capacity
12. Stewardship

Disciplines:
1. Science
2. Social Studies
3. Math

Objective:

The School Beautification Committee and/or the Environmental Education Team shall plan and plant indigenous trees and shrubs in an area on the school grounds such that in a year or two a suitable place for teaching the stewardship of the islands will be created.

The students working on the project shall learn about landscaping in its entirety-the optimum use of the land available, to produce an area pleasing to the eye, in keeping with good land husbandry principles, and providing a cultural setting of indigenous and interesting flora and fauna. A pond would be ideal since it broadens the possibilities for teaching-learning.

Rationale:

Homeowners modify the semitropical landscape to create a diverse ecosystem by planting for shade, for privacy, for fruit and for beauty, to name a few. They do this by controlling insects, by watering, pruning, weeding and feeding. In the schoolyard an outdoor classroom or nature trail can be created similarly. A representative cross section of students must be a part of the planning and care taking in order to make the planted area their own.

Materials Needed:

Seeds, seedlings, trees in pots as large as can be obtained, either from private persons or nurseries.
Garden tools such as picks and shovels, rakes and hoes.
Humus, compost, mulch, gut sand, manure, etc.
Garden hose

Directions/Activity:

To be undertaken by the students under the supervision of the Committee or E.E. Team.

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1. Choose an area of the campus which can be set aside for the classroom (with the approval of the principal). This area will necessarily be off-limits as a play area at recess. (A playground is probably the most abused land to be found - a nature study area is very fragile due to the interaction of soil, plant and animal organisms there.)

2. Draw a plan for this classroom. Pace off the dimensions of your area or use a measuring wheel. Draw this on graph paper noting the location of the sun, the topography of the area and any existing trees or shrubs. A low spot could serve as a pond area in rainy weather. This would allow for the embellishment of little fish, tadpoles and aquatic insects and plants. Indicate the placement of the trees and plants you have in pots spacing them to allow for some growth. If you have an eroded area try to include it in your nature area so that it can be worked on to correct later.

3. Ask students to bring donations of plant material from home. Distribute seed to students who want to sprout and care for them at home and return the potted plant. The objective is to involve as broad a base of the school as possible so that the pride will be shared by all or most of the school community.

4. Working from your diagram, start your final planting. Older students with the help of groundskeepers can dig holes to set in trees and shrubs. The hole dug must be a lot larger than the roots of the plant. This allows for backfill of compost, fertilizer, sand or whatever the soil is deficient in. Water well. A transplanted tree needs watering for the first several years after planting. Plant in advance of expected rains so that a good root system can become established before the next dry season.

5. Plant fast growing shrubs which you may plan to remove later when they are no longer needed and which make good shade meanwhile. Expect to lose some of your planting. Plan to cull out some others as they grow bigger and need more room.

6. Introduce some materials from established areas, such as rotting limbs, interesting rocks, ground covers. Scatter seeds with interesting berries; for example, some vines and ground covers to see if they will naturalize. Try some orchids and bromeliads.

7. NOTE: If you have water be sure to stock small fish so you don't hatch mosquitoes.

8. Plan to follow through with the ongoing nature of any planting. Examples are weeding, pruning, inspection for insects, watering and replacing of lost material. By dividing up the work and assigning a school-wide cross section of students who are interested in doing the work you could reduce or eliminate any negative impact on your project.

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Some suggested plant material where your area will support it.

Ginger Thomas	Mahogany	Mother of Cocoa
Cotton	Almond	Cocoa
Sugar Cane	Breadfruit	Pink Poui (Cedar)
Tobacco	Gumbo Limbo	Sea Grape
Danish Flag	Calabash	Lignum Vitae
Wedelia	Orange Geiger	Cashew Apple
Christmas Palm	Coconut Palm	Royal Palm

Teacher Reference:

Your Garden in the Virgin Islands, St. Croix Garden Club, 1971.