

Biodiversity Word Walk

Source: Beth Parks and Liz Hood

Basic Description:

This is a fun walk that can be made as long or as short as the group requires. A guide will take the group through the grounds where hidden letters are revealed, and small activities are done. Once the hike is finished the jumbled letters can be pieced together to spell a single theme word.

Materials:

- Letters printed or hand drawn on Bristol board or cardstock, laminated to prevent damage from the rain, with a corresponding word printed on the back.
- Examples of different seed types (see “R – range” activity)
- The usual collection of hike necessities- first aid kit, radio/cell phone, water, extra sunscreen, etc.

Time Allotment: 1-1.5 hours.

This can be significantly reduced if necessary. Letter-groups can be printed up with two or three letters on a card, with only one of the corresponding activities done for it. This would be suitable for younger groups, or groups with less time available.

Procedure:

Introduction:

- Welcome the group to the Mystery Word Walk. Explain that they will be given a walking tour of one of the most interesting parts of the BG/Arb, and while they are on the trail, they should be looking for letters that look like this (show example), hidden along the trail. When the walk is done and the letters are all collected, they will spell a mystery word.
- Set up a rotating leader who will walk first along the trail (this can also be done in pairs). Once the first person or pair has found a letter, they go to the back of the line and let the next person/pair lead.

Activity:

- The word offered here is Diversity, which at nine letters, means nine stops. Obviously you as the leader will have to hide the letters prior to the group’s arrival. Be sure to mix up the order. Hiding them in the same place each time will help you remember where they all are, and prevent a whole group from passing one too well hidden.
- In an exercise like this, don’t be afraid to play the clown a bit, or to keep things moving along- even if it means not debriefing every activity. The student’s should be kept interested, and a quick pace (though not rushed), can help that.
- **D – Delicate.** Have the group go out by themselves and find the most delicate plant they can find. When they’ve found one, mark it and show a friend.

- **I – Interconnections.** Have the group look around the area of the letter for evidence that a plant is connected to something else (for those students having difficulty, encourage them to think about how oxygen is made- thus every plant is connected to us. Other options are insect chewing, photosynthesis, plants taking up water and nutrients from the soil by their roots)
- **V – Variety.** Select a site with lots of species in it to hide this letter. Give the group 30 seconds to count as many different kinds of plants they can find. When the time is up, have the group circle up and ask (with a show of hands) who found 1 kind of plant? 2? 3? And so on, as high as you can go.
- **E – Energy.** Ask the group how plants get their energy. Right, the sun. Ask the group squish themselves into a tight, standing bunch. Ok, now, if you were all plants (and your feet are your roots, so you can't move them), and your whole bodies can make energy from the sun, how would you try to get the most sun you could? After the laughter has died down, get the group to step back and ask them- what kind of group of plants looks like you just did (forests, tall fields). Now ask them to spread out all around- and with part of your feet touching the ground (roots), how would you place your plant self to get the most sun now? Have everyone look around. Bring the group back and ask where plants look like they just did (the understory of a forest, or shady place).
- **R – Range.** This is a spin-off from Simon Says. It's called 'Simon Says Seeds...' Get the group into four big huddled bunches. Tell them they are bunches of seeds in a seed pod. And each seed pod has a different way of spreading their seeds. Walk up to the first group and say, "Simon says seeds in this plant take two steps from their pod. These seeds have dropped off their mother plant." Walk over to the next bunch and say "Simon says seeds from this plant are about to be popped right out of their pod! Take 5 safe, fast steps away from the pod, Now!" Now walk to the third group and say, "Simon says seeds from this plant have little parachutes on them and the wind has just picked them up! Take ten twirling steps in any way the wind blows you". Finally, walk up to the last group and say, "Simon says seeds from this plant have been eaten by a bear (insert regionally appropriate mammal or bird). Take 20 giant steps away from the mother plant. Ask everyone to take a good look at all the seeds. Ask- which plants will have a bigger territory? Which ones will have a smaller territory? What might happen if (walk over to the first group), this whole group of babies were dug up to make a new subdivision?
- **S – Scale.** Tell the group that we big tromping humans see things on a human scale- for example trees look big and bugs look small. But what if we were a bug? Get the group to make a spy-glass out of their forefinger and thumb and say this is your bug's eye view. Ask them to go out and find one amazing thing about a plant that fits into your bug's eye view (encourage them to get close, by kneeling down to find your own view). When they find something, have them show a friend.
- **I – Interesting.** Have the group go off on their own and take 3 minutes to find the most interesting thing they can about a plant. Show it to a partner.
- **T – Territory.** Most plants can't travel very far or very fast. In fact, if you are a plant, you can't move at all. Imagine if you could never pick up your feet again! Give the class a chance to decide what (within given boundaries), they would consider the perfect place to be and never move from. Invite the students to find a spot, and give them a chance to check out their new home. If it suits the group, you could run this as a solo spot, inviting students to sit or stand quietly, like a plant for a few minutes.
- **Y – Yummy.** Hide this letter in a place where there are tasting options for the group. These could be seasonally dependant (berries in late spring/summer/early fall), or traditional stand-bys like evergreens. Be sure to have children who are highly allergic abstain from tasting- but do encourage them to smell, or use another sense.

Follow-up/Discussion:

- Bring the group back to a central space and lay all the letters out. Give the group free reign to brainstorm and move the letters around to hopefully, create the word Diversity.
- Ask for someone to tell the group what they think diversity means. Then ask the group what other things they learned about what diversity is from today's walk.

Extensions:

- This activity can be done with any word- the emphasis being on creating fun and simple experiences and activities that give students an opportunity to explore the natural world with their own senses. Shorter words can be used.
- Back in the classroom, the class could make their own word walk to run for a younger class.



