

NEWS BREAK

Article: **Outdoor preschool could be good for the mind — and the gut**

Section: **NW, C1**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, February 9, 2025**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

****Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.***

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

Students will learn about the current outdoor pre-school trend and how it is impacting kids mental and physical health.

Pre-Reading Discussion:





- What do you think the article will be about, using these pictures?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words.

Fog gives way to **dappled** sunlight on a brisk morning as little voices ring through the thicket of trees at the University of Washington Botanic Gardens in Seattle, where the Fiddleheads Forest School hosts outdoor classes for 3- to 6-year-olds.

Dappled Guess:

Dappled Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Cole says the classes are _____ _____, a philosophy on display in the classroom.

2. Anyone who's witnessed a child jumping in a puddle knows that spending time outside can be _____. But that's far from the only benefit, a growing body of research shows.
3. Outdoor education has the potential to affect children's _____ and _____ health while teaching young minds about the environment and fostering an appreciation for nature.
4. It may also influence children's play in ways that benefit what?
5. Amber Fyfe-Johnson, an assistant professor at Washington State University, is studying the effects of outdoor time on kids' health. The early results of her most recent study indicate that kids in outdoor preschools see health benefits, like increased _____, compared with children in indoor preschools.
6. In recent years, the number of outdoor preschool programs in the United States has rapidly _____.
7. In Washington, the Natural Start Alliance estimates there are about _____ preschools where students spend most of their time outside and the curriculum is nature-focused.
8. Before getting a Ph.D. in epidemiology, Fyfe-Johnson was a naturopathic physician who felt limited by what she could do in the exam room to help what specific patients?
9. She believes all children need and deserve the health benefits that come from what?
10. Washington became the first state to license outdoor, nature-based preschools in _____.

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?
- What things did you already know from prior experience?
- How do you feel when you're outside in nature?
- Do you think outdoor pre-school is sustainable?
- How will impact student's when they transition back to regular school?

The Natural Start Alliance has found that nationally, white children are more likely to enroll in outdoor, nature-based preschools, while Black and Latino students are less likely.

- The article points out that more white kids go to outdoor preschools. Why do you think that is? What can we do to make sure all kids, no matter their race or family's money, have the chance to learn in nature?

Fyfe-Johnson is often asked how kids cope with the weather. Some teachers take the children on hikes, and some classrooms even offer fires. "Weather is an adult issue, not a kid issue," Fyfe-Johnson said.

- Do you agree or disagree? With appropriate clothing, do you think kids want to be inside sitting or outside exploring?

Health & Development:

- We learn that kids in outdoor preschools might have healthier guts. How could a healthy gut affect how you feel and learn? What are some long-term effects of having a healthy gut when you're young?
- Outdoor preschools let kids take some risks and learn about what happens. How is that different from learning about risks indoors? What kinds of risks are okay for young kids to take, and how can grown-ups help them stay safe outside?
- Some outdoor preschools let kids lead their own learning. How might that change how kids learn compared to when a teacher tells them exactly what to do? What are the good and bad things about each way of learning?
- The article says recess is a "must-have," not just a "nice thing." Do you agree? Why or why not? What are the benefits of playing outside for kids of all ages? How can schools make sure *everyone* gets good outdoor time, no matter where they live or how much money their family has?

Environmental Connection:

- How do you think being outside a lot when you're little changes how you feel about nature and the environment? Can outdoor preschools help kids become better at taking care of the Earth? How can these schools teach little kids to care about nature?
- What could happen to outdoor schools if the climate changes? Think about hotter weather, more rain, or other changes. How can these schools deal with these changes and still be safe and fun?

Policy & Practice:

- Washington was the first state to license outdoor preschools. What are the pros and cons of having licenses for these schools? How might licenses affect how good the schools are and who can go to them? Should other states do the same thing?
- Even if a regular preschool doesn't have a big forest, how can they still bring more nature into their classrooms and playgrounds? What are some creative ways to bring the outdoors inside?

Personal Reflection:

- Think about your own experiences in nature when you were younger. How did those experiences affect you? Do you think spending time outside is important for kids? Why or why not?
- Imagine you're a parent looking for a preschool for your child. What would you think about when deciding between an outdoor preschool and a regular indoor one? What would be the most important things you'd want to know about each school?

News Break is posted to the Web on Tuesday. Please share this NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please [register online](#) or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.
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