

Eco Rhythms

A Cycles Activity

Estimated time for activity: 45 minutes / 1 class period

Essential Questions

- What are the sounds and cycles of the ecosystem(s) we are a part of?
- How can nature inform how we create, perform, and respond to music?

Materials & Setup

- Plan to have learners sit in a circle.
- Arrange a variety of hand percussion and any other available instruments in the middle of the room (instruments made with natural materials like wood, seeds, etc are ideal). Pairs of sticks, rocks, clapping/snapping hands, and vocal cords work great too!

Background

This activity aims to facilitate connection with place through active listening and musical creation with nature-derived instruments. Participants will identify sound patterns and cycles in nature, and use their listening skills and creativity to recreate and elaborate on these sounds and patterns. Participants will explore the fundamental nature of music to humanity, and how we as humans contribute to the natural soundscape.

Activity

~30 minutes

1. Introduce the activity as one that builds a connection to place, and develops active listening skills by tuning into the sounds of nature, interpreting them, and expressing them back out through an interactive musical exercise. Explain that music has been part of humanity throughout our history - the earliest instrument archaeologists have found is a bone flute dating back 40,000 years! Music is so fundamental to our human nature that some researchers believe that music serves a similarly critical and core function of our human brains as language, enhancing problem-solving ability through creativity.
2. Ask everyone to close their eyes and breathe deeply for a minute, pulling focus from passing thoughts, and tuning in to the sounds of nature. Breathe in...1...2...3...4... Breathe out....1....2...3... 4....
3. **Discussion prompt:** What do they hear? (Examples: Leaves rustling, birds, their own heartbeat, leaves crunching under them?)
4. Ask everyone to open their eyes again, then ask for a volunteer to share a sound they heard, and select an instrument or share a vocal expression to mimic the sound. They may also share a sound they were reminded of from another experience in nature. Continue asking for volunteers until everyone willing shares a sound.
5. Explain that many sounds of nature have their own patterns, cycles, and rhythms - "eco rhythms". **Discussion prompt:** What are some eco rhythm examples they can think of? (Examples - crickets, bird song, our own heartbeats, tides, seasons, day/night, What are the purposes/meaning of these eco rhythms? How are the living beings that create these sounds connected in our ecosystem?)

GRADE LEVEL



ALL AGES

CONNECTIONS TO THE BIG IDEAS OF SUSTAINABILITY



Place



Cycles



Interdependence

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS



SCIENCE:
PATTERNS IN
NATURE



SEL:
MINDFULNESS,
ACTIVE LISTENING



MUSIC:
RELATE MUSICAL
IDEAS TO VARIED
CONTEXTS



HISTORY:
ANCIENT
CIVILIZATIONS

Activity (cont)

6. Ask for a volunteer to create an eco rhythm - either using the sound they replicated to create an eco rhythm or melody, or representing a rhythm or cycle from nature with sound. Ask them to continue cycling their eco rhythm.
7. Ask for another volunteer to build a complementary rhythm and/or melody atop the first. Continue building and encourage others to join as they hear an opportunity.
8. Enjoy the immersive eco soundscape!
9. **Discussion prompt:** Ask what the soundscapes make them envision? What do the sounds remind them of? Offer prompts to change emphasis and dynamics of the eco rhythm, ie a wind comes, now it's raining, the storm clears and now its night, what sounds might come out at night?
10. Invite participants to drop out their sound until everyone has stopped.

Debrief Questions

~15 minutes

- Why did you choose your sound?
- What skills did you practice to contribute your piece of the eco rhythm?
- How did it make you feel?

Resources:

Read and listen more about the connections among music, nature, and sustainability with the resources below:

- [Which came first: Music or language? \(Moore, 2012\)](#)
- [Nature Has a Good Beat, but Can You Dance To It? \(Joyce, 2012\)](#)
- [The story of music is the story of humans \(Montagu, 2017\)](#)
- [Music Education for Surviving and Thriving \(Smith, 2021\)](#)
- [Composers created music inspired by seismic readings from Yellowstone National Park \(Rascoe, 2023\)](#)
- [Close Listening: Decoding Nature Through Sound \(NPR\)](#)
- [The Birdsong Project, National Audubon Society](#)