Eco-Narratives
A Storytelling, Connection, and Reflection Activity

Objective
Explore one’s relationship with nature through reflection and storytelling as a way to not only educate and inquire but also connect and inspire action.

Essential Questions
1. What is your relationship with nature? What experiences have influenced your thoughts about nature?
2. How can you illuminate the connections between humans and the environment to drive positive change for a sustainable future?

Materials
Eco-Narratives Brainstorming Handout or paper and writing utensil
Recording device such as phone or laptop
Laptop or tablet with access to Canva, Google Slides, or Powerpoint.

Background
Eco-Narratives provide the stories and purpose for climate action and climate justice. When we integrate personal and collective stories with the process of Civic Science, we allow for deeper connection, understanding, and empathy. Storytelling helps to frame the "why" and adds context to facts, data, and science, which can encourage ideas for further investigation and inspire action. Storytelling also preserves culture and history and fosters personal growth and reflection. This activity outlines the various steps to create one’s eco-narrative; and steps can be scaffolded or expanded further to align to standards for different grade levels. Each step and timing can be adjusted to meet your students where they are.

This is also an interdisciplinary activity that can be practice for another project that involves video or media. For example, if you wish to create a video to submit for Nat Geo’s Slingshot Challenge, Eco-Narratives can be created as an introduction to the challenge to help develop connection and context and serve as practicing the process of video/media production. Content from your Eco-Narrative can even inform another project, such as the Slingshot Challenge.
Activity

Step 1: Brainstorm

1. Generate discussion on nature and students’ connection with nature by first giving them a picture of a local green space. Ask them what they see, notice, and how they feel. What is their connection to this green space or nature in general? What role does nature or the environment play in their lives? Are they a part of nature or separate from nature? Why?

2. Explain in addition to facts, figures, and data, stories play an important role in passing on knowledge, lessons, culture, and history. Ask them to name any stories or legends they have been told by family or community members. Why do they think they were told any of these stories?

3. Introduce Eco-Narrative: a story that shows one’s connection with nature often narrating how nature/the environment has affected who they are today, why they want to study a specific environmental topic/issue, or why they want to take action within the communities of which they are part.

4. Provide the questions on the brainstorming handout (below) and have students either answer one, a few, or all the questions to reflect on their own personal connection. You can also adjust these questions to the students’ ages and abilities. It is highly recommended for the students to initially do this brainstorm by drawing or writing out their ideas with pen and paper instead of typing. Studies have shown that the action of writing by hand can boost links among brain regions and enhance learning and memory.

5. Have students read aloud or explain their response(s) to a partner and provide each other feedback. Often this feedback process can be worrisome for students. Provide the following sentence stems for students to use in order to give feedback that is supportive and constructive.
   a. I like...
   b. I wonder...
   c. What if...

6. Then open up space for any students to share whole group. You may even have them summarize their partner’s story (with permission) for the whole group.

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**Step 1: Brainstorm - Grade Level Modifications**

**Pre-K - 1**

Instead of writing, students could draw their response to one of the brainstorming questions. OR they could draw a picture of nature and illustrate what they like or don’t like and how nature makes them feel. You may notice whether they include themselves (people) in this picture of nature. This can open up a discussion about our (humans) relationship or connection with nature.
Activity
Step 2: Draft & Revise

1. Provide time for students to draft their initial brainstorm into a cohesive paragraph or even an extended response of multiple paragraphs or essay. If students have responded to more than 1 prompt, have them choose one or combine ideas from each prompt into one narrative. Their narrative should have a clear beginning, middle, and end (or introduction, body, conclusion). An end to their narrative doesn’t mean the story is complete but rather it could mark the beginning of a new way of thinking from that point on, a new question this experience sparked, or next step they now want to learn or take as a result of this experience. A basic drafting document is provided below, but there are many ways to scaffold this for students.
   a. To scaffold their draft, provide them with a paragraph structure that aligns to the CER format of writing explanations in science - Claim + Evidence + Reasoning = Explanation.
   b. Basic graphic organizer - see below for an example; or use what students may already be familiar with and adapt as needed.

2. Conduct a round of peer review of eco-narrative drafts and have students revise based on feedback. This can be done a few times if needed until they have their final draft. Use the same feedback protocol used in step 1 - peers provide feedback using the sentence stems, I like, I wonder, what if...

3. Have students read aloud their eco-narrative a few times, so they can hear their own voice telling their story. This may even be part of the revision process as they may want to update certain parts once they hear what it sounds like aloud.

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Step 2: Draft & Revise - Grade Level Modifications
PreK - 1

Students could share their drawings with one another and then as a class determine what are the common ideas (feelings about or connections with) nature that were illustrated. List out these different ideas on the board, and students can be guided to label their pictures with the corresponding word. Then in student groups, each group is assigned (or chooses) an idea/feeling/connection; each group can draw one collective picture together about nature to illustrate this idea, and label parts of the drawing. OR each individual in the group can draw their own picture about nature that illustrates this idea.
Activity (continued)

Step 3: Storyboard

1. Once students have a final draft of their eco-narrative, have them highlight 3-6 key lines/moments in their eco-narrative.

2. Create a storyboard of these lines either on paper or digitally. If done on paper, they can draw or list what kind of images (or videos) they will like to use for each line they chose. If done digitally, they can insert some pictures (personal or found online) into their digital storyboard document.

3. Have students peer review their storyboards in pairs or small groups to help generate feedback and clarify ideas for the images.

Step 3: Storyboard - Grade Level Modifications

PreK - 1

Make copies of each group’s illustration so that each group has a set of all the class illustrations. Tell the class they are going to combine all these into one story—one eco-narrative—that shows all the different experiences, ideas, and feelings people have about nature. Therefore, each feeling is shared and validated. Have each group discuss and determine how they want to order the different illustrations and ask them to provide their explanation as to why they would put them in this order. After each group has shared out their preferred order, have the class come to consensus on the way they want their class collective eco-narrative to be.
Activity (continued)

Step 4: Finalize & Record

This step can be done a few ways depending on tech access and ability.

Option 1: Slideshow with audio using Canva, Google Slides, or Powerpoint.

1. Students create a slideshow of pictures (or videos) either of themselves or found online that illustrate a few parts of their story based on their storyboard.
2. Once their slide show is complete, they record their audio with the slideshow. See links below for more instructions on how to record.

Option 2: Video Collage using Canva (or other media application).

1. Audio record the students or have students record themselves reading their eco-narrative aloud. They can record themselves using their phone--many phones have a free voice memo app--or another device such as laptop or tablet.
2. Open up Canva and choose a Video Collage template or create one from scratch.
3. Upload your audio recording.
4. Input your images/videos and edit to coincide with the specific lines from your audio.
5. Optional: add background music.

Step 4: Finalize & Record - Grade Level Modifications

PreK - 1

Teacher inputs each student/group’s picture into a slideshow application (Canva, Google Slides, Powerpoint). Teacher audio records each student/group explaining their illustration. Then inputs the audio into the slideshow for each respective illustrations.

Step 5: Publish!

When students create an original piece, it’s important that they have a chance to publish it in some way. Some publishing examples:

- Host a viewing party within your class, with other classes, for your entire school, or virtually and invite parents/guardians, community members to attend.
- Post videos online (with media permission) either to school’s social media page, class website, school YouTube channel.
- Submit and present your videos into a local community event
- Showcase your videos at CELF’s Student Symposium - in-person or virtual.
Reflection
1. What did you learn about yourself through this process?
2. What did you learn about nature and your relationship with nature? human beings' relationship with nature?
3. How did telling your story make you feel? How did hearing your peers’ stories make you feel?

Citations & Resources


Slingshot Challenge Materials/Resources
- Educator Toolkit
- Participant Toolkit (students)
Eco-Narrative Brainstorm

Choose one or more of the following prompts and write a response. Be as specific as possible when answering the prompt. Write or draw your response on a separate sheet of paper.

**Elementary (K-5)**

1. What is your favorite part about nature? Why? What do you love about it? OR What part of nature are you most thankful for? Why?
2. What is your favorite place outside to explore? OR What is the most beautiful outdoor place in the world? What do you love about it?
3. Write about your favorite thing that lives outside. It can be a flower, an animal, a vegetable, etc.
4. If you were a part of nature, what element (earth, air, fire, water, tree, cloud, flower, etc) would you be? Why? OR Choose one element of nature (a tree, flower, cloud, etc.) and write a poem from its perspective.
5. Do you think that people take enough time to appreciate nature? Why or why not?
6. Why do you think nature inspires so many writers and artists?

**Middle & High School (6-12)**

1. Write about a moment when you felt a deep sense of gratitude and reciprocity with nature. Describe how this connection with the natural world influenced your perspective on life and your relationship with the environment around you.
2. Write from the perspective of a being in nature (rocks, soil, animals, plants, water, etc), reflecting on their purpose in the ecosystem, the responsibilities they uphold, and what humans can give back to ensure their continued health and vitality.
3. What is your personal definition of sustainability? How did you learn this?
4. Describe a significant moment that made you aware of environmental issues.
5. How has your personal background or identity shaped your relationship with the environment?
6. Have you faced any environmental challenges or injustices in your community? Describe one or more.
7. Are there any environmental activists or leaders who inspire you to do your work? Why?
8. Have you witnessed any positive changes or successes in your community regarding environmental justice? What are they?
Eco-Narrative - Drafting Document

Using your brainstorm, notes, and feedback from the class discussion, draft your eco-narrative below. This can be multiple paragraphs, but make sure there is a clear beginning, middle, and “end” to your narrative. An end of your narrative doesn’t mean the story is complete but make sure to end with a reflective point, question, or next step. Use space below and loose-leaf paper if needed.
After you have drafted and revised your eco-narrative, choose 3-6 lines/moments that you think are most important. Write the sentence(s) of each moment in the spaces below marked “narration.” Then, draw a picture that illustrates your words OR choose an image, picture, or video (your own or found online) that you think best illustrates your words of that moment.