

Taking Learning Outside the Classroom

1. **Know the place.** Place-based education is more than walking out the door. Spend time in your outdoor community or place, and appreciate its learning affordances. Is there a quiet gathering space for large groups? A clear landmark for a meeting spot? A map or other signage? Particular plant and animal species? Stories that capture the true history of this land?
2. **Honour the land.** Know whose territories you are on for your acknowledgement. Be clear of your intentions to be on this land. What can you offer the land in return? How might you facilitate reciprocity with your students? Ask the questions: What has happened here? What is happening here? What should happen here? Who belongs and how do they belong?
3. **Be prepared and inclusive.** Inform your students of proper clothing/footwear. Layers work best. Specify washroom locations (if any), trail length, a clear sense of the terrain, and similar outdoor/community experiences for reference. Supported learners are more likely to engage.
4. **Ask why.** Is your intention to teach content outside? To build community or resiliency? To improve access to equitable learning? Knowing your intention can bring meaning and focus.
5. **Let go of the lecture.** Leave the PowerPoint behind. Instead of asking “What topic can I teach outside the classroom?” ask “How will going outside enhance this lesson?” Instead of lecture, tell a story. Learning in community can—and should—be active and experiential. Remind students that both lecture and assessment are being let go so that they can sink into the experience.
6. **Embrace the spontaneous.** Let go of a specific timeframe. Being outdoors can bring distractions (e.g., birds, cars, rain). However, a flexible facilitator can fold these into the learner experience. For instance, birds are holders of myth, language and ecology. Allow for emergent learning and incorporate student questions and curiosity right in the moment.
7. **Ask powerful questions.** Avoid naming things or asking “what is this called?” or other simple questions. Come prepared with questions that provoke curiosity, critical thinking, and further inquiry. Give students time to ponder, and do not provide all (or any!) of the answers.
8. **Be patient.** Going outside the classroom takes time to pack and walk or carpool (or you can pre-arrange a clear meeting location). Don’t view this as time lost. Instead, let students connect with one another, or give them a specific task or discussion topic to engage while they walk.
9. **Be patient (again).** Teaching a definition (e.g., isosceles) is different than cultivating caring agents of change who act to make the world a better place. This takes time and practice.
10. **Make it an adventure.** Get excited about going out. Start or end the journey with a story, poem or quote that sets the tone for excitement or wonder. If you are enthusiastic, your learners will likely be as well.



Outdoor Activities to Engage Learners in Any Discipline

- 1. Walk and talk.** Have learners pair up and discuss a particular topic or idea. Relationship building is perhaps the most important role of a teacher, and connecting outdoors is often easier than inside a formal classroom. Rather than seeing walking as time lost, use walk and talks to build community, or incorporate Gillian Judson's *Walking Curriculum* (e.g., Human impact walk, systems walk, what's under foot).
- 2. First Peoples' Principles of Learning.** Engage in activities and discussion that connect with Indigenous ways of understanding. Consider: How does this land support the community? What are the consequences of our actions on this place? What memories, stories, and histories are embedded in this place?
- 3. Make a connection.** Ask students to find something connected to the course topic or discipline in question. Be sure to have your ideas ready. Hint: every discipline has some connection to the natural world. Even appliance repair. Use what students find (e.g., leaf, twig, stone, bug, moss, litter, pop can) as a source of discussion or topic for a free write.
- 4. Free write.** Have learners write for 5 minutes without stopping. No editing. Just write. The natural world can serve as inspiration for writing prompts. This can also serve well for essay brainstorming, critical thinking on a topic, or getting down ideas for a project or presentation. Afterward, ask them to read over what they wrote and highlight one or two short phrases, with an (optional) invitation to share. Note: requires pen and notepad.
- 5. The place speaks.** (With thanks to Zuzana Vasko). Give learners the writing prompt: "If this place could speak, what might it communicate to you?" Choose the location carefully. This could be a sit spot, a particular tree or stream, a construction site, or a developed/industrialized area. The prompt or question can also focus on a particular aspect of place (history, sociology, or *insert your discipline here*). You might also emphasize the land/place as a source of wisdom. E.g. at a river ask yourself, "Where have you been? Where are you right now? Where do you want to go?" or at site where trees were clear cut "What stories did this place once hold? What has been lost?"
- 6. Focused activities.** Have learners draw a map or diagram of a place, highlighting particular areas or impressions. They can use their phones to take a specific photo or engage in slow photography. Do a mindfulness activity such as a silent walk or listening to near/far sounds. Be confident in your facilitation, and your learners will likely be more confident.
- 7. Reciprocity.** This last item is perhaps the most important. What can your group offer back to this place? A song, story or other offering? Bring a bag to collect garbage or recycling left in the area. By engaging in a respectful and intentional manner, this 'hidden curriculum' can model reverence and responsibility.

Note: these are meant to be starting points. Please visit the [full online guide](#), which includes [examples of place-based education](#) by KPU instructors and subject matter experts.