Adding Vitamin “N” to your classroom!

Richard Louv is a journalist and author of outdoor education heralding books such as *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age*, and most recently, *Vitamin N: The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life: 500 Ways to Enrich Your Family’s Health & Happiness*. He also has a blog where he gives advice and provides the latest findings in research oriented towards children in the outdoors. Here at Taft, we love seeing students learn about nature while in nature, but we also realize that this can be difficult to do back at school. Here are some tips straight from the horses blog about how you can add Vitamin “N”ature to your classroom!

1. “Join the Natural Teachers Network.”- Louv provides a link to C&NN’s (Children and Nature Network) Natural Teachers Network as well as the Natural Teachers eGuide.
2. “Teach the teachers— and the principals, superintendents, and school board members too.”- Get some continuing education focused on outdoor learning!
3. “Bring nature to the classroom.”- Hatch some eggs for a local farmer, or even have a tank with a praying mantis in it! Plants are also a great choice with the added benefit of cleaning your classroom’s air.
4. “Establish an Eco Club.”- Sponsor hikes around the neighborhood, or even a trip to a National Park!

Read the full article at http://richardlouv.com/blog/every-teacher-can-be-a-natural-teacher/
Nature’s Notebook at Taft

Nature’s Notebook is a program through the National Phenology Network that strives to connect people to natural changes around them. The following is the definition of phenology by Nature’s Notebook.

Phenology refers to key seasonal changes in plants and animals from year to year—such as flowering, emergence of insects and migration of birds—especially their timing and relationship to weather and climate.

Anyone can join and contribute to the database. You can even earn badges for observing certain species that are a part of a campaign. Beginning in March, Taft has been contributing to the Shady Invaders campaign which was created by researchers at Penn State University. The goal is to learn the timing difference between native and non-native species phenophases; the changes of a shrub from the first budburst to the last leaf losing color. Invasive species tend to have longer growing seasons, referred to as Extended Leaf Phenology. This causes more competition for sunlight, not just the native shrubs, but for the understory plants as well. A vast majority of a forest’s biodiversity can be found a foot or less off the ground, and without adequate sunlight, those native species might not be able to go through their own phenophases properly!

Fifteen different species are brought into the spotlight for this campaign, seven of which are invasive, and eight are native to the eastern United States. Taft has selected two types of invasive species, Morrow’s Honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*) and multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), as well as one native species, alternateleaf dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*). Two to four times a week, a staffer goes out with the observation sheets and writes down specific observations made about the plant: How many buds are bursting (starting to show a bit of leaf)? How many leaves are emerging (you can see the petiole, which attaches the leaf to the branch)? How much of the possibly canopy is filled? All of this data is then uploaded to the site where it can be accessed by the researchers at Penn State University!

Nature’s Notebook is a great way for people of all ages to contribute to the greater knowledge of plants and animals in our country! You can even make your house, school, or favorite park an observation site! To sign up, visit [https://www.usanpn.org/natures_notebook](https://www.usanpn.org/natures_notebook) and get started today! You can even check out our site using their visualization tool!

Does your class participate in any citizen science? We would love to hear about it!
Inspired by Nature

Historically, Lorado Taft campus was the site of the Eagles Nest Art Colony, where artists of all sorts came into nature to be inspired. There were painters and writers, sculptors and sketchers; all searching for that spark they could not find in their home cities. Even today artists gravitate toward nature to find inspiration. But inspiration is not just for professional artists! It’s for anyone! Below are some examples of Shape Poetry, where the shape of the poem resembles the subject of the text, created by our very own educator, Jennifer Mitchell.

Are you inspired? Send us your poems and you could see your work on our Facebook page or in a following newsletter!

The Rock River

Fish

Fins

And tails,

Scales and gills

Make a fish a fish.

Those without these cannot be counted among their pisces-ly kin. Splash and dart.

Wriggle and school. Swim the riverdance with your beloved.

Be unafraid

Hold your Breath and leap into that Strange world up there made Of Air.

The Sauk and Mesquakie.

They traveled up and down my valley.

I recall with sorrow their last journey. Now

A new people dominate the land. Today I flow Past highways and over dams. Instead of bison,

A new kind of cattle drink from my shores. The roots

Of corn reach for my waters now. Gone are the grasses

Of the prairie. I will forever run to my sister, until the world is changed. Older than grandfather of trees but ever new and ever changing.

I am the destroyer stones and the nurture of life. I am the Rock River.
Taft Book Club!

Below are some of the Environmental Educator’s favorite nature related books! Check some of them out and let us know what you think!

THE OTHER WAY TO LISTEN
Byrd Baylor and Peter Parnall

MYCOPHILIA
Revelations from the Weird World of Mushrooms
Eugenia Bone

JURASSIC PARK
Michael Crichton

THE DISAPPEARING SPOON
An Ecologist’s Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment
Sandra Steingraber

LIVING DOWNSTREAM

STELLALUNA
Janell Cannon

Top row from left to right: Joshua, Amy, Katie Q
Middle row: Alyssa, Ashley, Melanie, Jen
Bottom row: Kylie, Shannon

WANTED
Be in the next newsletter!
Email melcostello@niu.edu your best picture of an animal, plant, or fungus that you took on your trip to Taft. Didn’t bring a camera? Send us a drawing of an Illinois species. We will research it and include that in the next newsletter. Don’t forget to include your name, school, and what class you were in that inspired your artwork.

Taft Times Contributors:
Ashley VanSpeybroeck—Nature’s Notebook, Inspired by Nature, Adding Vitamin “N” to Your Classroom, Summer Book Club
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