

Discover. Share. Create. Learning in your Gardens



The Blue Mountains
BOTANIC GARDEN
Mount Tomah

Place-based outdoor learning through Primary Geography lessons at The Blue Mountains Botanic Garden Mount Tomah

Children are spending less time outdoors due to urban design issues and indoor screen usage. Conversely, research overwhelmingly supports the integral role of outdoor educational experiences in a child's learning and development, especially in primary aged students. This is because outdoor learning promotes a relationship with the environment, creating an understanding of the surrounding world. Lloyd and Gray (2014) show a connection between outdoor learning and a sense of appreciation and responsibility of the environment. They demonstrate the importance of regular visitations to the same outdoor environment through place-based outdoor learning to give students the opportunity to become attached to the place. Coupled with environmental knowledge and awareness, place-based learning helps students become 'active environmental change agents.'

Place-based learning provides contexts set in the real world of children, that is, in their own locality. It allows children to connect to their local environment and to care for the community they live in. As teachers, you will be preparing children for the wider world by developing life skills as they immerse themselves with nature and share meaningful experiences with their class mates. Fieldwork, use of geographical tools and opportunities to roam create favourable memories as students reconstruct and 'own' the geography programs, deepening geographical understanding and engagement. (Dolan, 2016)

Place-based outdoor learning at The Blue Mountains Botanic Garden (BMBG) involves outdoor activities, opportunities for social development and environmental education in a local environment. The learning is open ended and child centred. Students can interact with, create and recreate these local spaces. Through the new lessons produced for each stage in Geography at BMBG, children can be pedagogical developers as they explore and discover. They can pose inquiry questions after their

explorations, develop answers to their questions and share their experiences with the class. As the learning is local, these experiences can be shared more widely with their friends, family and community.

The BMBG is an ideal location to share nature with students to engage them with plants and the environment in the world heritage listed Greater Blue Mountains. At 1000 metres above sea level, you will see vistas to Sydney while enjoying the unique cool climate plants in a diverse array of themed gardens. The place-based learning Geography lessons at BMBG have been developed in consultation with a geography syllabus expert and our team of talented and passionate Education Officers are skilled deliverers in nature pedagogy in an outdoor environment. To help with excursion planning, the risk assessment matrix provided by the Department of Education and Communities OHS Directorate 2006 is completed for easy inclusion into risk management procedures.

Geography lessons at BMBG for ES1 – S3

ES1– Mapping the Mountains

Students will engage with nature as they follow a trail using a simple map and collect natural items found on their journey. These natural items are then collated into a pictograph. This engagement with natural materials and the surroundings will help them answer key inquiry questions about the environmental features of the BMBG.

S1– Spotto Sense Scavengers

Students use their senses to explore the Garden and discover its features and uses. Textures, colours and shapes are examined through hunts to group, match and describe plants and items in the environment around them. Use of symbols to mark their discovered plants on a simple map is included in a spotto game. Data gathered during the fieldwork is recorded graphically and pictorially.

Primary Geography – Place based learning



S2– What’s About?

Students discover mapping and landscape features of the greater Blue Mountains. Looking locally at the mountains and towards Sydney, they can identify landforms and places they may recognise. These are recreated using fun methods involving natural loose parts and clay or playdough! Use of observation and maps helps students discover how the environment supports the lives of people and other living things.

S3– Jungle Jive

The concert has already started!! Find a ‘ticket’ to enter the cool temperate rainforest to uncover the delights of this natural environment. Students discover the adaptations of the rainforest plants and mark on a map where these are located, using compass points and geographical terms. They take a photo of these plants and pose environmental inquiry questions to help develop a broader appreciation for this special environment.

These lessons not only address outcomes from the geography syllabus, they use geographical concepts, tools and information. As the students participate in fieldwork and use natural materials, ideas about place will be gained to help connect children when back at school, so sustaining their engagement. Skills, knowledge and attitudes related to the subject matter of nature pedagogy will be experienced, enabling teachers to introduce students to the outdoor classroom of the school grounds or local parks.

Teachers can develop environmental strategies to increase your students’ connectedness by

attending our teacher professional development afternoon at BMBG on May 3, 2017. <https://www.bluemountainsbotanicgarden.com.au/Learn/Events/Teacher-Preview-Blue-Mountains>

For more information about these lessons, our immersive twilight and sleepover experiences and to book a learning experience visit our website – <https://www.bluemountainsbotanicgarden.com.au/Learn/Primary-School-Excursions>

References

- Dolan, A (2016) Place-based curriculum making: devising a synthesis between primary geography and outdoor learning. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 16:1, 49-62, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2015.1051563>
- Lloyd, A. & Gray, T. (2014). Place-based outdoor learning and environmental sustainability within Australian primary school. *The Journal of Sustainability Education*. http://www.jsedimensions.org/wordpress/content/place-based-outdoor-learning-and-environmental-sustainability-within-australian-primary-school_2014_10/

