

TH Activity Plan – Teenager’s Field Guide

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will create a personalized field guide as part of sense of place activity.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Expand knowledge of sense of place/location & botany, horticulture; strengthen research skills

Physical: Develop functional skills related to writing & drawing

Psychological/Emotional: Develop a stronger attachment to a sense of place of their choosing; develop stronger sense of autonomy

Sensory: Observe & experience nature interpreting visual, olfactory, auditory inputs

Social: Share field guide with others, in session, classroom or other; provide positive feedback to peers

Materials

Compostable hand wipes

Blank journals

Drawing utensils (graphite and colored pencils, pens, markers, erasers)

Magnifying glasses

Measuring tapes or rulers

Local plant ID reference book or dichotomous key

Digital camera or phone camera (1)

Example of plant sketches

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Consider teaming up with a local botany expert who can assist with accurate IDs & demonstrate using a dichotomous key.
2. Facilitator begins session by thanking everyone for coming out to study & document their local plants.
3. Explain the importance of knowing local plants & why scientific documentation is vital to furthering understanding of the world.
4. Ask students what plants they can already identify in the area that they may have noticed when they arrived. Offer praise for knowledge & encouragement for lack of knowledge – they’re here to learn after all!
5. Instruct students to pick 3 plants in the area they want to document & identify. Remind them that knowing the size of leaves & height of plant is important to proper documentation. Remind them to closely observe the leaf margins, stem shapes, presence or absence of hairs, the sheen of the plant, & other key differentials. Show sample sketches for ideas of what to document.
6. Give them the option of working in pairs or separately.
7. Ask one student to volunteer to hand out the journals, one student to hand out the measuring tapes & magnifying glasses, & one student to pass around the pens to the group.
8. Set a timer for 30 minutes & tell students to start their observation documentation. Encourage individuals who may be hesitant to draw – let them know to try their best & that pictures can be taken & sent to them to work on later if need be. It’s not about perfection, it’s about practice!
9. While students are observing & writing, facilitator can walk between groups photo-documenting the plants to later reference if accurate ID

- or finished sketch is not possible during session. Offer commentary & praise as they move between students/pairs.
10. Gather back together at the end & share findings. Use reference material, consult botany expert or [dichotomous key](#) to determine plant IDs.
 11. Discuss importance of binomial nomenclature for accurate naming of species. Students should write the IDs on their journal pages. Encourage students to also assign their own “common name” for the plants they chose based on their personal observations.
 12. Activity could be repeated in the same area during different seasons, or in different ecosystem (say, field versus shoreline) to fill out journals for long term classes or programming. Number of plants ID’d can be adjusted for time constraints.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Developing a sense of place by observing and investigating specific areas like forests, meadows or even schoolyards can address a variety of goals – therapeutic, educational, recreational and wellness. Using a TH activity of creating a [personal field guide](#) is one approach to expanding an attachment to a physical place, while supporting psychological/emotional connections to nature and plants. By sharing field guides with others, social and educational goals can demonstrate expanded interpersonal and communication connections as well as cognitive skills of knowledge acquisition and research abilities.

This TH activity is written for youth or teenagers but is applicable to other populations. This age group has the intellectual capacity to link research, science-based learning, ecology, and geography to abstract concepts like sense of place. The process of creating a field guide should strengthen their sense of belonging and sense of identity to a geographical area as well, which is considered to be important for “building social and emotional foundations children need and will one day use as adults” (Brillante & Mankiw, 2015).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication need to be identified prior to session. Session delivery site should be accessible and free of hazards. Sun protection and water should be available while in the field. Closed toed shoes recommended. Depending on location, remind participants to look out for snakes, wasps or other potentially hazardous wildlife.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Several THADS have been written that provide horticulture information with the sense of place theme for specific areas like [Ontario Wildflowers](#), [Nova Scotia Plants](#), [Michigan Plant Diversity](#), and [California Native Oaks](#). These may inform participants and facilitator.

To add to sense of autonomy, students could [create DIY journals](#) in a prior activity session.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Brillante, P., & Mankiw, S. (2015). [A sense of place: Human geography in the early childhood classroom](#). *National Association for the Education of Young Children.com*
- Creative Educator. (2025). [Fantastic field guides](#). *Creativeeducator.tech4learning.com*.
- Fleming, L., Stark, B., & Brown, J. (2025). Plants and sense of place: Applications for horticultural therapy. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*, 35.
- Stark, B. (2023). [Fostering sense of community using native plants](#). *Cultivate*, 3(3).
- University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (2023). [Dichotomous key activity](#). *UWSP.edu*.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.