

EXPLORING MOVEMENT IN NATURE



This guide is designed for afterschool and out-of-school settings, such as enrichment programs and camps, but the activities included will work almost anywhere.

Learners will exercise an explorer mindset through creative stretching and breathing exercises with this activity during out-of-school time or classroom learning. Help youth have fun indoors or outdoors as they create yoga poses inspired by plants, animals, and other living things.

Tag your photos with **#NatGeoBioBlitz** and inspire others to explore nature and the outdoors.

This National Geographic activity guide is made possible with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

ACTIVITY: NATURE-INSPIRED YOGA

30-60 minutes or more

Can be adapted for all ages

Indoors or outdoors. Virtually or in person

OBJECTIVE:

Observe characteristics of an organism. Then, individually or in small groups, create yoga poses to represent the organism. Join together as a group to share poses, exercise, and have creative fun.

STUDENTS WILL NEED:

Printed "Nature-Inspired Yoga" handout or journal (optional), pencil/pen (optional)

PREPARATION:

Determine if you will use an indoor or outdoor space. Make sure the space is flat and free of obstacles or hazards. Look for examples of plants, animals, or other organisms that may inspire yoga poses, such as trees, birds, insects, fungi, and plants.

SKILLS FROM THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC LEARNING FRAMEWORK:

- Explorers **observe and document** the world around them, and they can make sense of those observations.
- Explorers **communicate** experiences and ideas effectively through language, movement, and media.
- Explorers **collaborate** with others to achieve goals.

DIRECTIONS:

STEP 1: BE A TREE

See if the group can guess your yoga tree pose. Stand tall with hands touching above your head, and with feet together or with one foot leaning against the opposite leg. (This pose helps with balance, posture, and also relaxation through slow, deep, comfortable breathing.) Have the group follow your lead, matching the pose and breathing in and out slowly for 20-30 seconds. Ask: *Can anyone guess what this pose resembles in nature? What reaches up toward the sky, is strong, and sometimes sways in the wind?* Separate your arms and wave them back and forth, with fingers spread like leaves on your “tree.” Have those who are balanced on one foot switch their feet to practice balancing on the other leg.

Ask if anyone has participated in yoga before and share a bit of context. Originating in India thousands of years ago, yoga helps to strengthen and stretch muscles, while also easing tension and relaxing the mind through slow, comfortable breathing. Remind the group: **If moving your body in a certain way hurts at all, do not continue that movement.**

Explain that the group will create new yoga poses based on “biodiversity”—the variety of life. Brainstorm the biodiversity in your community, including birds, insects, trees, plants, flowers, etc.

STEP 2: EXPLORE NATURE TO INSPIRE YOGA POSITIONS

Working individually or in pairs, have learners observe plants, animals, or other organisms (or photos of these things). Ask learners to pay attention to the forms, shapes, movements, and behaviors of what they’re observing, and then choose one organism to inspire the yoga pose. Instruct them to remember their organism but do not share it yet. Ask: *Is it actively moving (like a squirrel or bird)? Is it passively moving (like a tree or grass in the wind)? Or does it stay still (like a mushroom or lichen)?*

After making observations, individuals or pairs quietly design a yoga position or sequence of movements (called a “flow”) inspired by the organism. For example, a bird that flaps, soars, and flaps again might look like a yoga pose with stretching, bending, and flapping of arms. Learners can draw their poses in their explorer journal and name or describe them.



Swaying in the breeze (right) and tree pose, still (left)



New poses: elephant and crab



STEP 3: SHARE AS A GROUP

Bring everyone together in a circle, spreading out and facing each other. One at a time around the circle, learners introduce their pose or flow of poses, being sure to breathe slowly in and out, too.

The group breathes and poses along with the sharer, and then takes turns guessing what organism the pose is modeled after.

After everyone has had a turn, end with some relaxation and deep breaths!

EXTENSIONS:

Create a routine: Engage in a weekly yoga practice as a group, using the same or new poses.

Remote programs: This activity translates well to virtual learning. Participants can observe organisms outside through a window, or imagine a plant or animal they've seen before. After they create their pose, everyone can share together during a video chat.

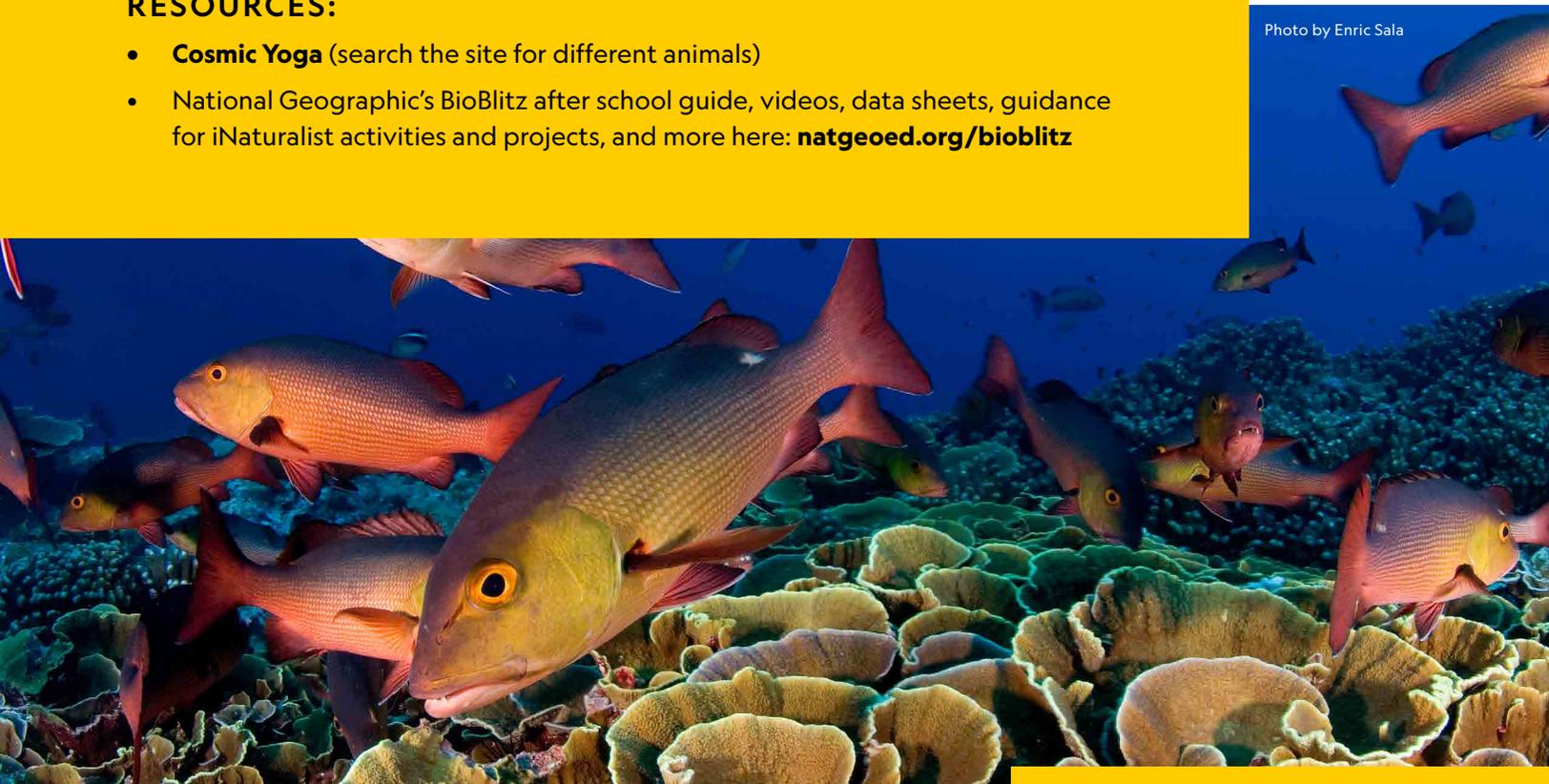
Try a "cardio" workout: For really active groups, have them create movements that together make a cardio workout, incorporating jumping, jogging in place, and other high-energy movements.

Make a bulletin board: Have learners draw each pose and its name on paper and post together as a visual display to revisit and practice again.

RESOURCES:

- **Cosmic Yoga** (search the site for different animals)
- National Geographic's BioBlitz after school guide, videos, data sheets, guidance for iNaturalist activities and projects, and more here: [natgeoed.org/bioblitz](https://www.natgeoed.org/bioblitz)

Photo by Enric Sala



NATURE-INSPIRED YOGA

Observe a plant or animal. What do you notice about its shape, movement, and behavior? Create your own yoga pose(s) that represent the organism, and draw them here.

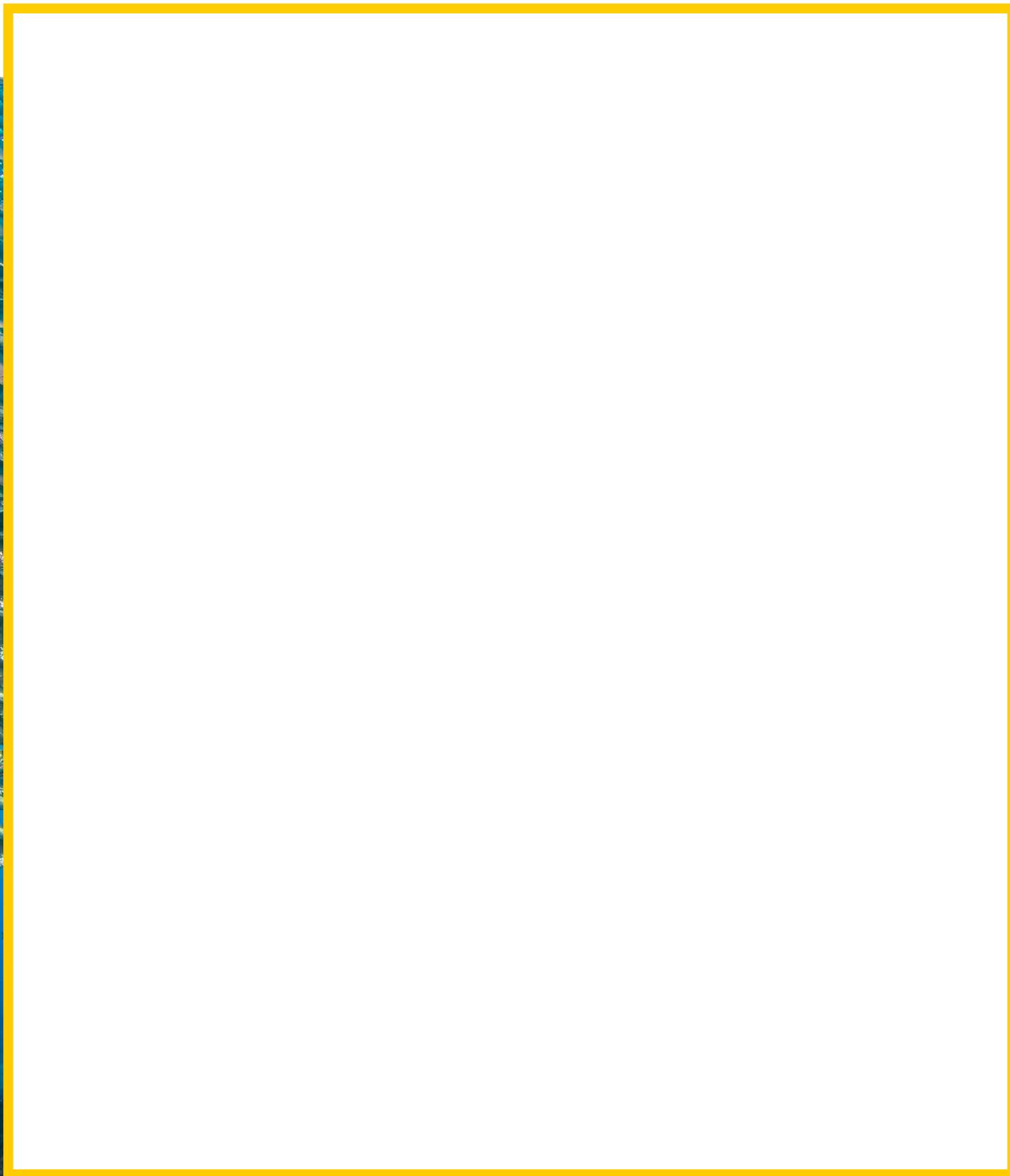


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