

# BIOBLITZ APPROACHES FOR CREATIVE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING OUTDOORS

*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 build an explorer mindset while developing and applying the mindfulness practices of noticing, observing, and questioning. There is nature everywhere, in wild places, and in rural, in suburban, and in urban communities. Youth discover it while practicing mindfulness—bringing focus to themselves in their surroundings—and noticing nature they might otherwise overlook.

This activity guide is made possible with the generous support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Tag your drawings or photos with **#NatGeoBioBlitz** and inspire others to get creative outside and explore.

## ACTIVITY: NATURE SKETCHING

30-60 minutes or more

Can be adapted for all ages

Indoors or outdoors. Virtually or in person

### PREPARATION:

Determine if you will use an outdoor or indoor space. If outdoors, scout for potential risks and mark boundaries. If using an indoor space, gather leaves, plants, pictures of animals, or other items that learners can use to think about nature outside. Gather colored pencils, crayons and/or markers, and determine if learners will draw in a notebook, on large paper, or on the attached Ten Questions handout.

### OBJECTIVE:

Begin developing an explorer mindset through mindful outdoor experiences and journaling. Notice, wonder, and ask questions about the nature observed.

### TOOLS:

A journal and/or the printed Ten Questions handout, a pencil, colored pencils or markers (optional), large paper (optional).

## ATTITUDES FROM THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC LEARNING FRAMEWORK:

- **Observe and document**—Explorers are curious about how the world works, seeking out new and challenging experiences throughout their lives.
- **Responsible**—Explorers act with concern for the welfare of other people, cultural resources, and the natural world. They are respectful, considering multiple perspectives, and honoring others regardless of differences.
- **Empowered**—Explorers feel empowered to make a difference. They act on curiosity, respect, responsibility, and adventurousness, and they persist in the face of challenges.

## DIRECTIONS:

### STEP 1: SPARK SENSORY AWARENESS

Talk with learners about nature in their community. Ask: *What senses help you experience nature around you?* Next, set everyone up for a few minutes of stillness, inside or outside. Have everyone find a space to sit if possible, facing in different directions. Help them be still for a few minutes, saying aloud the following prompt to help them use their senses to experience their surroundings:

*Our everyday lives can sometimes be hectic. Between home, school, and other activities, our minds are often racing with thoughts. When was the last time you slowed down?*

*Take three deep breaths and try to let those thoughts drift away from your mind... and bring yourself to this moment. Breathe in deeply through your nose, exhale slowly through your mouth. Let's take five more deep breaths together.*

*Now, while we continue our relaxing breathing, let's bring our attention to our senses: What do you see? Hear? Feel? Smell?*

Or, for younger learners, use a step-by-step approach, choosing the senses that work best for your audience:

*What are 4 things you see?*

*What are 3 things you hear?*

*What are 2 things you feel? (This can be with sense of touch and/or emotions.)*

*What is 1 thing you smell?*

Have learners share their sensory observations. Capture the group's observations in a place everyone can see. Ask: *How were your observations similar to each other's? How were they different?*

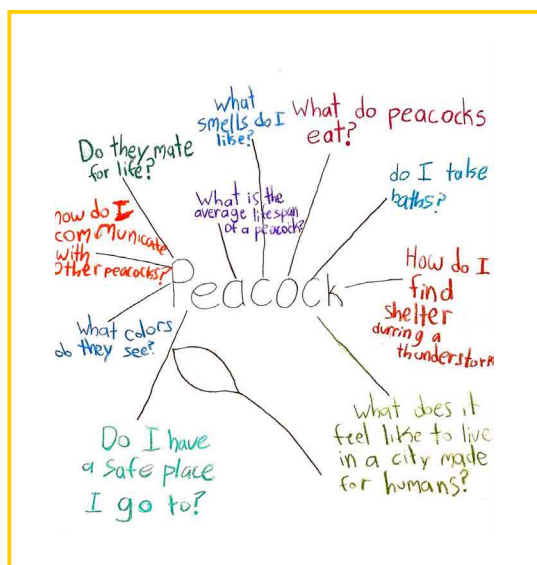
Now that we have explored our surroundings with our own senses and perspectives, we'll use our curiosity to ask questions about the plants, animals, and fungi in our environment.

## STEP 2: EXPLORE AND EXPRESS

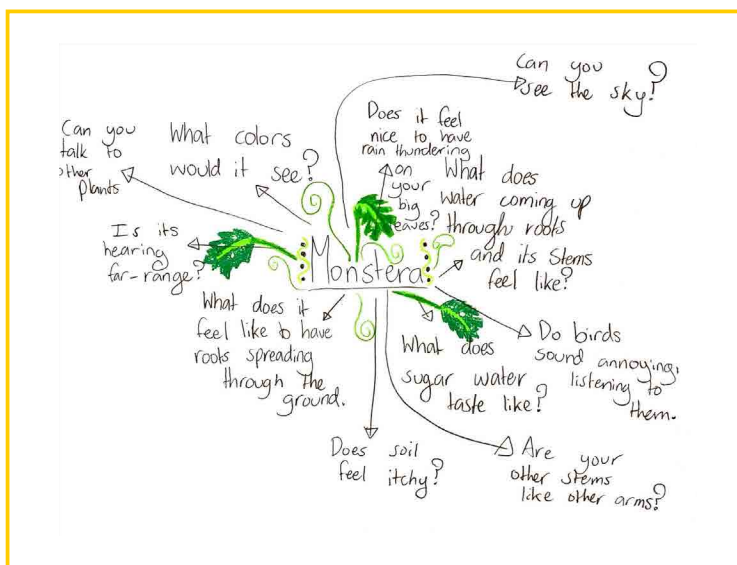
Set the group up to ask questions about the natural world. Ask: *Do you ever wonder about the nature around you?* You can share something you wonder about, and ask the group to add their ideas.

Explain that this journal activity is designed to spark their curiosity and capture questions about something in nature. Let them wonder freely as they ask ten questions about the world from the perspective of an animal, plant, or fungi. Use this Ten Questions prompt to inspire their imagination:

*Find a plant, animal, or fungus to observe, and ask ten questions about how it experiences the environment around it. What might it see, smell, hear, feel, and taste? What else do you wonder about it?*



Artwork by Gabriella, age 12



Artwork by Becca, age 10

## STEP 3: SHARE

Have participants share their questions. There are many ways to share creatively. Here are a couple of ideas:

- Display their drawings and questions around the indoor or outdoor space, and have learners walk around to look at each other's questions.
- Build a "wonder wall" where learners choose 3-5 of their favorite questions and write them on three sticky notes for the wall.

Wrap up by connecting to the beginning of the activity. Explain that they all used their senses to observe their surroundings, and imagine how a plant, animal, or fungus experiences the environment. Ask: *What did you notice today that you haven't noticed before about your surroundings? What would you like to learn more about?*

**Tip:** Some learners may observe with a more scientific perspective, asking questions about the animal's life (like the peacock below). Others may take a more imaginative approach (like the monstera plant below.) Give them freedom to be creative with their questions, with no need for answers (or perfect spelling)!

**Celebrate everyone's observations, curiosity, and creativity!**

## EXTENSIONS:

**Write a story or draw a comic strip:** Give learners the opportunity to go a step further by using their ideas to develop a story or comic strip.

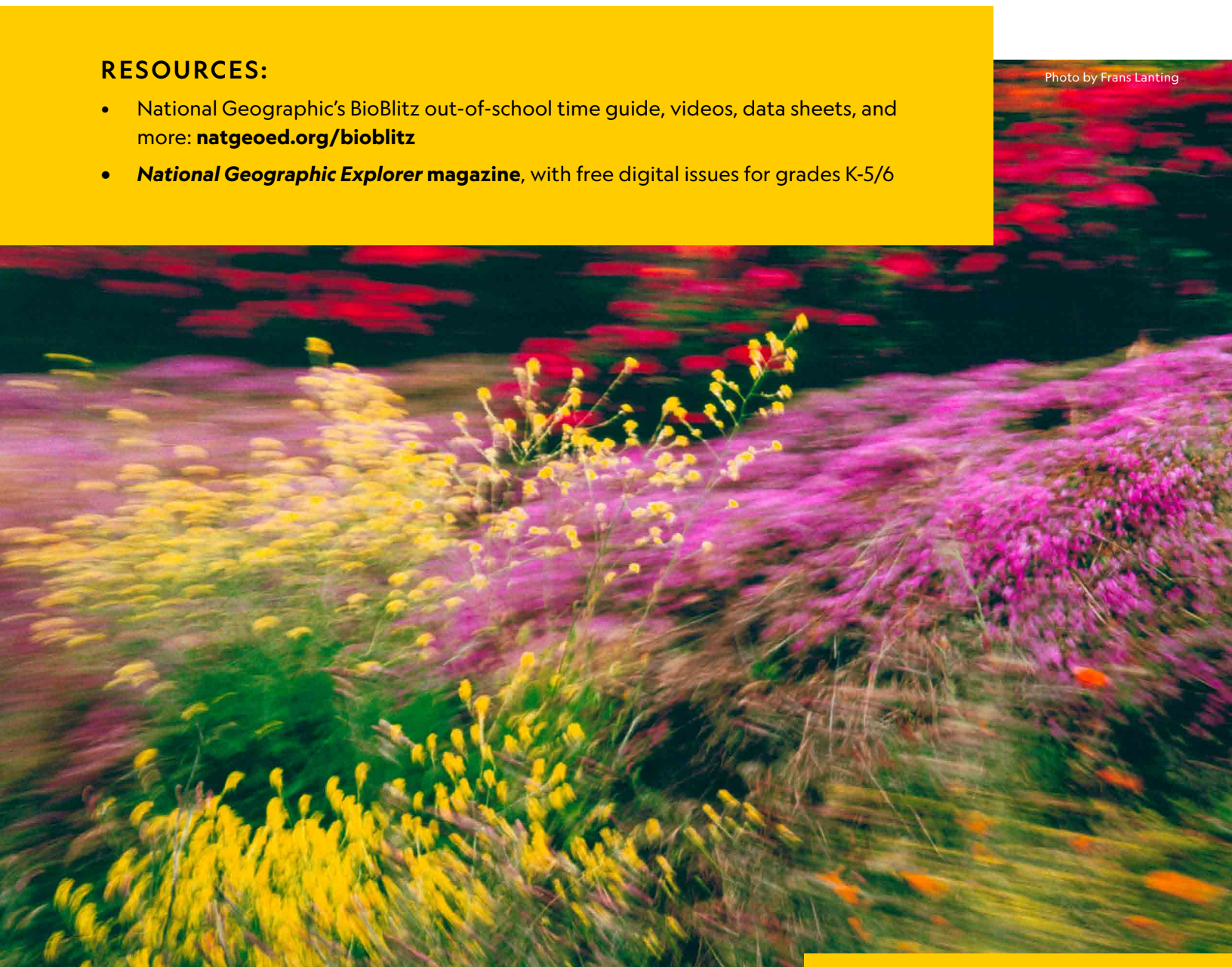
**Build a routine:** Learners can visit the same place each week to make observations throughout the seasons. (See the “Adopt-a-Spot” activity.)

**Extend the inquiry:** Choose one question each week for more exploration. Let learners help to develop projects to study in the field or to research using technology.

## RESOURCES:

- National Geographic’s BioBlitz out-of-school time guide, videos, data sheets, and more: [natgeoed.org/bioblitz](https://www.natgeoed.org/bioblitz)
- *National Geographic Explorer* magazine, with free digital issues for grades K-5/6

Photo by Frans Lanting



# TEN QUESTIONS

Choose a plant, animal, or fungus. Write its name in the center. Draw lines to ten questions about how it experiences the world. What might it see, hear, smell, taste, or feel?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Photo by Helene Schmitz