

INSPIRATION FROM NATURE TO DEEPEN OUR PRACTICE

RestorativeTeachingTools.com

OBJECTIVE

Relax and observe. The natural world offers many lessons to help us ground, trust, and deepen our understanding of so much: change, systems, community. Allowing ourselves to slow to a pause simply to notice provides an opportunity to amplify our perception with all senses. Reflecting on and integrating our perceptions of nature engages imagination and stimulates creativity. This activity is an invitation for you to pause, observe, wonder, and reflect. Our hope is the process will deepen the creative capacity you bring to restorative practices while also offering you a holistic restorative respite wherever you are.

MATERIALS

This activity can be done individually or in a group. Anyone participating should have materials they enjoy using for reflection and expression, such as a journal, art supplies, a musical instrument, or props for physical movement. If doing this activity as a group, ask participants to bring the materials they would like to use, as well as some to share with others who may need them.

Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds by adrienne maree brown is highly recommended reading to support this activity. brown's beautiful use of starlings, mycelium, water, and more as examples for teaching biomimicry and its role in emergent strategy is a central inspiration for this activity. brown provides reference to many artists, authors, thinkers and groups who offer insight about these concepts to help prompt your imagination!

INSTRUCTIONS

Set aside at least two hours' uninterrupted time in a place you feel safe. First, notice. This activity can be done individually or in a group. In either setting, the first step is to slow down, become quiet, and get outdoors if possible. If you can't be outdoors, reach into your memories or imagination to explore the natural world. With either approach, you may need to walk, meditate, or use other mindfulness practices to become present. Notice objects or symbols that attract your attention, and follow those. Sit with a tree, gaze at a flower, stare at the sky, rub a blade of grass. Or in your mind, let your vision drift upward as you watch a palm tree waving, guide your vision to the ocean's edge. What do you hear? Smell? Taste? See? Feel? Rest in your senses. Pause and notice. If your mind wanders, kindly and gently bring it back. Stay present in this space for at least 15 minutes.

Second, reflect and express. Pick up your journal, art supplies, musical instrument, or anything that stimulates your creativity. Draw, write, or create anything that comes to mind related to your noticing. Anything goes! It is helpful to be in a “yes, and” space, avoid judging or filtering whatever comes up. Consider metaphors, symbols. Keep going until you feel complete.

DEBRIEF

This is an activity that does not require a debrief. One’s own experience in the activity holds meaning and value just as it is.

If you and your community would like to debrief, consider doing so in circle. Through rounds of sharing in circle, invite participants to share both verbally and non-verbally. While validation and discussion can help to deepen the experience, avoid evaluations or comparisons. Respect the sanctity of others’ experiences by guiding the group not to assess or assign meaning.

LESSON

Cultivating creativity will help restorative skills thrive. Practicing being present and listening with all senses supports our well-being and also supports us in our work as restorative practitioners. The natural world is full of incredible models and motivation for the restorative social movement!

Note on Resources: If you are unable to access a copy of *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by adrienne maree brown, you can also find helpful resources on the Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute, namely the “Let the Choir Say Now” zine. A brief synopsis is available through Yes! Magazine, “How the Wonder of Nature Can Inspire Social Justice Activism.”

AN EXAMPLE FROM KATHLEEN

On a recent family vacation to the beach, I was captivated watching crabs.

First, it was crabs on a cement step that bordered the ocean, where I watched crabs getting drenched by sporadic ocean waves that seemed to pound their tiny shells, drain and recede, then wash over them again. The crabs seemed content to remain still while the waves came again and again, then suddenly they'd bolt across the step, presumably to snatch up some tasty micro-organic treat. Stillness... then a quick burst of movement. Seemingly unphased by the chaos of the waves (or perhaps acutely aware of the waves?), their timing, their predicted force and impact. Later, sitting very still in the sand, I watched as crabs that had been completely invisible, hiding just under the surface of the sand, revealed themselves. Only when there were no humans or other sources of movement nearby, one crab popped up and skittered quickly across the sand. Then another, and another. I wondered how much they were sensing each other as much as the absence of threat. I watched and wondered, and looked for the crabs throughout my vacation. I recognized my complete lack of knowledge of crab facts, and instead, inspired by *Emergent Strategy*, delighted in wondering about them and what I might learn through observation and imagination.

Where I went with my reflections: For a couple years I've tried to confront and transform beliefs I've ascribed to for so long, at first unknowingly, about time and urgency. Beliefs guided by scarcity thinking, that direct us to keep moving.* Keep moving to change, to make a difference, to succeed in your cause or mission. Don't waste time, be productive. Do more. Don't stop. One more thing. Running out of time... never enough!

But what about the lessons of the crabs? What about staying still, waiting, listening, watching, until the time is right to move? What about pausing and trusting? What about valuing stillness as much (or more) as action? What about knowing the waves (potential threats) so well that you can let them splash, slam, create chaos all around, and remain still and safe, just present and trusting that the time to move will become clear. Remaining focused, attentive, training the senses and the intuition to relax, to find gentle awareness in place of constant vigilance.

In full transparency, my reflection and learning is still unfolding at the time of creating this activity. Writing this, I wonder if one day I will skitter through the internet and educate myself about crabs. For now, imagination will do.

*Note that I also see my responsibility to address such beliefs-- and cease to perpetuate and impose them-- as part and parcel of confronting internalized aspects of white supremacy culture and values of a capitalistic patriarchal system.