



Playground Changes Lesson Plan

Overview

In this integrated activity, students develop both writing and artistic skills as they document changes in their school environment. Children will observe how the environment of their school playground changes throughout the year by drawing and describing plants, animals, landforms, or playground scenery. On three occasions (fall, winter, spring), students will record of the effects of seasonal changes on the playground environment. These records not only help them understand seasonal changes, but also provide teachers and students with a portfolio that will show their growth as writers and artists throughout the year.

Suggested Lesson Sequence	Please see Foundations: Migrations and Changes module description.
Lesson Level	Entry
Science Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will observe environmental changes over time on the school playground, including changes in plants, animals, and landforms.• Students will observe how seasonal changes impact plants and animals.
Lesson Assessment Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessment and Standards Table (Word)• Assessment Activity Description• Authentic Assessments

Materials

- This lesson requires [Adobe Reader](#).
- Drawing [Playground Changes Activity Sheet](#) (PDF) or equivalent paper with space for drawing and writing
- Crayons or pencils

Vocabulary Words

- Caption - a written description of a drawing or a picture
- Environment - the area in which someone or something lives, including plants, air, animals, and human-made objects

- Precipitation - rainfall or snowfall
- Season - a time of the year, usually having distinct temperature and precipitation patterns that influence living things
- Temperature - how warm or cold something is

Procedure

I. Assessing Prior Knowledge

The intent of this lesson is to help children recognize the ways in which seasonal changes affect living things - both plants and animals. Depending on when the lesson is started, teachers should begin to assess students' prior knowledge about seasonal changes by asking them to describe the current weather outside. Next, the teacher might ask students to describe what the weather might be like in 3 months, and how weather changes might affect plants and animals. Probe students' understandings to determine what indicators they use (e.g., the leaves fall off the trees, it will snow, the grass turns brown, etc.) to illustrate seasonal changes.

II. Contextual Preparation

To prepare students for the activity, encourage students to think of one object (a plant or animal or landform) in a park, wildlife sanctuary, or perhaps their own yard that would be impacted by the changing seasons. For example, trees lose their leaves; bears hibernate for the winter; the water in a pond freezes when the temperature drops below freezing, etc. Ask them to brainstorm ways in which they might document how that plant or animal would change (or adapt) as the seasons change.

III. Student Activities

1. Children should select a location on the playground to which they will return periodically throughout the year. Using the activity sheet, *Playground Changes*, children may draw or sketch interesting scenery in this location (e.g. plants, insects, rock formations, streams). Be sure to have children record the date of the drawing.
2. Children should be given opportunities to share their drawings with peers. Teachers might facilitate a discussion about their observations and the habitat they have selected. For example, what do you see on the ground at your location? What do the plants look like? What colors do you see? This discussion is for preparing children to write a caption for their illustration.
3. After children have shared and discussed their drawings, have them write a caption for their piece of artwork. (Alternatively, children who are not yet proficient writers may

verbally describe their drawings to be recorded by an adult.) As they write their captions, they should be encouraged to think about the following: What is it that they want their viewer to notice? What is important about their drawing? What questions or connections came to their mind as they were observing or drawing? You can facilitate the writing process by providing a few sentence starters such as the following:

Notice... This reminds me of... I wonder... I predict...

4. At least twice during a different season or time of the year, children should return to the same location on the playground and repeat the previous steps. Classroom discussions should emphasize the ways in which both the season, and the drawings of students, are changing.

IV. Assessment

As noted, this activity provides both teachers and students a written record that documents not only seasonal change, but also students' growth as writers, thinkers, and artists. Children should be asked to compare their drawings and make inferences about the causes of observed changes. For example, the teacher might ask the students to explain questions such as: How is the habitat the same throughout the year? How is it different? Of course, answers will vary depending on the climate and ecology of the school environment. However, children should notice things like color changes in the vegetation, trees that lose leaves in winter, or during dry periods, plants that might stay green all year, etc. In addition to providing assessment opportunities for teachers, these discussions provide a foundation for future lessons in the ESC program (in particular, see the [Birds on the Move](#) lesson at the entry level, and the [Migrations del Mundo](#) module the intermediate and extended levels) that more carefully explore the notion of global vegetation changes over time.

Lesson Extension for Authentic Assessment

As an extension of this lesson, students might be encouraged to keep a photo or artistic journal of the changes they see on their playground on a weekly or monthly basis throughout the school year. Students could either draw or take digital photos of the playground regularly, and record descriptions of other observations they make (animals they see, temperature, precipitation, etc.)