

Earth potatoes activity

Objectives:

Affective:

- feeling of connection to the earth
- accepting dependence on earth
- feeling joy and comfort in contact with the earth
- remaining calm amidst nature's forces
- fostering centering and reflection

Sensory / cognitive awareness:

- see nature from diff. physical perspective
- use sight, hearing, touch and smell, and all senses together
- slow down mentally and attend to one's environment
- directly experience natural setting for prolonged moment

The title of this is meant as a humorous take off on "couch potatoes" I explain to the students that the latter term is derogatory because it denotes passivity. But in this activity, passivity is positive. I offer the perspective that the earth embraces us, even if we can't feel it, and how difficult it is in our culture to appreciate and relax into the passive experience of being loved (but less so in Japan, where the language has terms for it!). This activity gives you a chance to relax and feel that embrace. We are from and of the earth, as shown by our very skeletal and muscular form. Invite the student to experience the earth's embrace for more than 10 minutes. Lay quietly, absorbing everything that happens as if you were just a part of the earth. Because you *are* just a part of the earth! Give a low-key warning that if they have a little invertebrate visitor they should just let it do what it wants, and it is likely to just go on its way without bothering them at all. Let them know that if at anytime they can't endure the activity any longer they are free to stop and follow the old road down around the toe of the hill to where the rest of the group will be. But most students find that they want to keep doing the activity longer, and some do it on their own time with friends later.

The procedure after the introduction is to have pairs find a place to lay their partner down, away from the foot path, but avoiding risky cliffs, etc. Also avoid being too close to others (about 25 feet away is good). They should have an intimate view of the forest environment above and around them, preferably nestled among some low plants. Ask the partners to bury their body a little under a few fallen leaves, even over parts of their face, but not fully obscuring their vision. Tell them they are to remain still, taking in everything from their senses until their partner returns and it will be their turn. So be considerate with your partner!

Adapted from earlier sources, such as Joseph Cornell's Earth Windows, from his *Sharing Nature with Children*.