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Military Youth Wonder through Nature

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Grade Level: High School

Estimated time: 1 Hour

Description/Overview: Youth will reflect as a whole group and individually through nature observations, drawing a nature object, and group discussions.

Objective: The learner will reflect on the impact of being a military teen and to see how teens their age inside and outside of the military are more alike than they are different. Learner will gain a better understanding of themselves through activities themed around nature.

Georgia Educational Standards: Lesson is not for classroom

Materials:

- Markers/pens/pencils
- Flip chart paper
- Pine cones/same item from nature enough for everyone to have one
- Mixture of nature objects about 10 (rocks, mushrooms, pine cones, sticks, leaves, bug...)
- Pictures related to the military/families/civilian life (PDF Document)
- Print off graphics for decorations (PDF Document)

Reference:

1. Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Jaycox, L. H., Tanielian, T., Burns, R. M., Ruder, T., & Han, B. (2010, January 1). Children on the Homefront: The Experience of Children From Military Families. Retrieved from
2. Committee of Children. (2020). What Is Social-Emotional Learning? Retrieved April 20, 2020, from <https://www.cfchildren.org/what-is-social-emotional-learning/>
3. Larson, J., PhD, CTRS, & Kreizer, M. J., RN, PhD (Eds.). (2016). How Does Nature Impact Our Wellbeing. Retrieved December 19, 2018, from <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/environment/nature-and-us/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>. University of Minnesota's Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality and Healing
4. Pathways. (2020). *Social-Emotional*. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from <https://pathways.org/topics-of-development/social-emotional/>.
5. The Pennsylvania State University. (2018 November). *With A Little Help from My Friends: The Importance of Peer Relationships For Social-Emotional Development*. Retrieved April 29, 2020, from <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2018/11/with-a-little-help-from-my-friends--the-importance-of-peer-relationships-for-social-emotional-development.html>



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6. *What Is Social-Emotional Learning?* (2020). Retrieved April 20, 2020, from <https://www.cfchildren.org/what-is-social-emotional-learning/>.
7. 11 Scientific Reasons Why Being in Nature is Relaxing. (n.d.). Retrieved December 19, 2018, from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/60632/11-scientific-reasons-why-being-nature-relaxing>

Preparation: Collect nature items, write the two ending quotes on paper and hang, hang up 4-5 pieces of chart paper for graffiti wall activity, write the questions on the graffiti paper, and pick out the route or boundary for the nature walk.

Facilitator Adaptation for Pine Cone Reflection Lesson Plan:

This lesson was created for a military teen audience in a camp setting; however, you can adapt the lesson to fit your audience needs. If you are working with a nonmilitary group adapt the graffiti wall activity, question prompts, and wonder wheel activity to fit a topic that your teens might be struggling with, a current local issue that has impacted the teens, or any topic that fits the theme of your day event/camp/afterschool event. If you have questions on how to best adapt the lesson to fit your needs, feel free to reach out to Laura Goss for assistance at laurwalt@uga.edu

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Lesson at Glance:

- Lead get to Know You Game- 10 minutes
- Pine Cone Art- 5 minutes
 - Youth choose a pine cone/nature object to draw
 - Youth try to match the pictures and actual objects together
- Wonder Wheel – 10 minutes
 - Part 1: Nature Wonder Wheel Activity
 - Part 2: Military Wonder Wheel Activity
- Graffiti Activity – 30 minutes
 - State some questions for youth to think about
 - Youth take a silent nature walk
 - Graffiti flip chart activity
 - Youth or Adult led discussion reviewing the graffiti paper
- Wrap Up- 3 minutes



Lesson

Get To Know You Game- 10 minutes

- Never have I ever or similar get to know you game of your choice
 - Goal: To help youth learn about each other, which will help teens become more comfortable in order to share with one another.
 - Note: If class starts late take this game out and skip to the draw activity

Draw- 5 minutes

- **Materials Needed:**
 - Same Nature Objects (example pinecones)
 - Drawing Utensil and paper
- **Facilitator Notes:**
 - Lay out the nature objects so all youth can see the objects (Choose one of the following items: pinecone, sticks, rocks, or leaves)
 - Idea: Have youth create a circle around the objects in order to see easily
 - Make sure you have enough for each student
 - Provide one color pencil/marker/writing utensil per person
 - Provide one paper per youth member
- **Direct Youth to:**
 - Pick out an object
 - Draw the nature object
 - Have youth put drawings back in the middle along with the nature objects. Also, be sure to mix up the objects and drawings up.
 - As a whole group have youth try to match up the drawings with the objects
 - Discuss light heartedly if anyone could match the object with the drawing

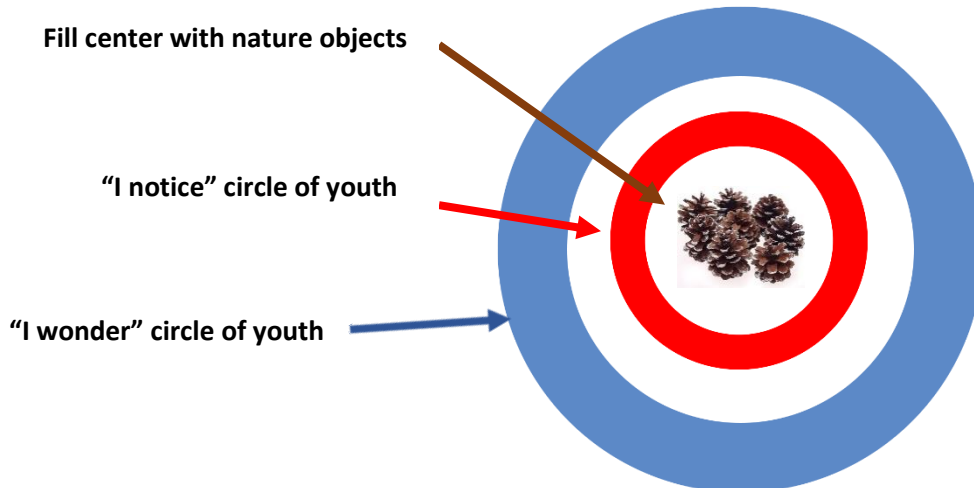
Wonder Wheel- 10 minutes

- **Materials Needed:**
 - Part 1: A mixture of nature items (mushrooms, sticks, rocks, pine cones, turtle shell, leaves, dirt, moss) or choose to continue to use the same nature objects as the drawing activity.
 - Part 2: Pictures of military and related pictures (provided via PDF)
- **Description:** Have youth stand in two sets of circles around the nature objects. The inner circle closest to the objects is the “I notice circle”. The second circle furthest from the objects and behind the first circle is the “I wonder circle”. The goal is for youth to describe and share about what they see and what they don’t know about the nature



objects. This is to get the youth comfortable with the activity and to become more vulnerable.

Graphic Example of Wonder Wheel Activity:



- **Activity Part 1:** Have the youth in the 1st circle comment on things they notice related to the nature objects in the middle. After a little bit have the second circle comment on things they wonder about related to the nature objects.
 - If group is having a hard time thinking about the "I notice" or "I wonder" statements below is a list of ideas to share with the group:
 - I wonder if any of them are the same
 - I wonder how many different types of pinecones there are?
 - I wonder why some pinecones are dull and some are sharp?
 - I wonder how quickly it takes for a pinecone to biodegrade?
 - I wonder how easy it is to make a new pine tree from just one pine cone?
 - Note:
 - Use the above only if needed and after giving them time to think, silence is okay
 - You do not need to know the answers to the youths "I wonder" statements, because the goal is for youth to wonder and share
- **Activity Part 2:** Take the nature activities out of the circle and exchange for the military graphics (Wonder Wheel Picture PDF) and have the teens switch circles, so that the teens in part 1 of the Wonder Wheel activity are responding differently in part 2. Have the youth in the 1st circle comment on things they notice related to the images in the middle. After a little bit have the second circle comment on things they wonder about related to the military images in the middle.
 - If group is having a hard time thinking about I notice or wonder statements below is a list of ideas to share to help the group: (use only if needed and after giving them time to think, silence is okay)



- I noticed that there are different jobs shown in the pictures
- I notice that family is shown a lot, but the families represent different ethnic groups
- I wonder why these pictures were chosen
- I wonder if these are people or if they actually went through a deployment like me
- I wonder how old he was when his Dad left for the first time
- I wonder what it takes to be a pilot

Discussion Activity-Graffiti

- **Description:** Facilitator hang large pieces of paper (post it note chart paper) on walls, so the youth have to move throughout the room to read the posters. Participants are encouraged to use markers or crayons to reflect and respond on military life via the prompts written on the paper. After the youth have marked on the “graffiti” paper it is used to facilitate a group reflective discussion.
- **Activity Lead Up/Setting the Stage:** Gather the participants together and ask them to reflect on their experiences during camp. Provide youth a few minutes to think about the below questions. During this time, you are not looking for a response, so you can move through the questions quickly. Activity is preparing youth for the silent walk.
 - Example of prompting questions to guide youth thoughts:
 - What did you accomplish this week?
 - How were you challenged, what did you do well at?
 - How has being a military dependent impacted you?
 - How do you benefit from the military?
 - What have you learned from your parents?
 - What is something you struggle with when your parent is gone?
 - How do you help out your family when your parent is deployed?
 - What do you look forward to?
 - How different are you from the others in this room and how alike are you?
- **Youth take a silent walk- 5 minutes**
 - Provide youth time to think and reflect on military life and the discussion topics that were previously listed.
- **Draw/write: 10 minutes**
 - Materials Needed:
 - Multiple sheets of large blank paper (flip chart paper works well)
 - Markers or Crayons
 - Posters
 - What have you enjoyed about camp?
 - What is something positive about being a military dependent?



- What is something hard about having parent(s) in military?
- Poster Note:
 - Facilitator can choose from prompt questions provided and/or have as many posters with questions as needed to provide youth time to process, wonder, and question.
 - Leave one poster blank to see how youth respond.
 - After the participants return from the nature walk reflection, move them to the area where the poster paper is posted. Provide youth with markers/crayons to respond to the poster questions. Restate some of the initial reflection prompts as needed. Guide youth if needed with responding to the posters. Allow youth time to doodle and write all over the paper in order to express feelings and thoughts.
 - When all participants have finished, collect the markers/crayons and place the paper(s) in a place where everyone can view them (if not already).
- **Discuss: 15 minutes**
 - Bring youth back together for flip chart/ graffiti activity discussion. Ask the exact same questions as before using the flip charts as a guide for the discussion.
 - Facilitator ask the following questions and other questions based on the graffiti wall/poster responses:
 - Ask, participants to describe what they see on the paper
 - Ask, participants about each poster to see if there is a theme or if any comments stand out
 - Note/Idea: Have a youth only Discussion-Adults leave the room and allow youth to discuss what they see on the flip charts. If you choose to do this, I suggest choosing a couple of youth leaders or camp counselors to help the conversation stay on task and orderly while the adults are not present.
 - Why: Youth desire time to discuss and learn from each other without the pressure of adults listening
 - Risk Management: While adults might not be in the room be mindful of adult supervision and risk management. Leave the doors open if in a closed space and have adults stationed outside ready to step-in as needed.

Wrap Up: 3 minutes

- Facilitator Share the following quotes: (post them throughout the room)
 - “We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.” Maya Angelo
 - “You are not a drop in the ocean but an ocean in a drop.” Author unknown
- Drawings- As they leave hand them the nature drawing as a reminder of the discussion and the connections they have with others. (OPTIONAL)



Support for the Lesson

Support for Lesson Design: A Natural Environment Helps You Center Your Mind

A research team at the University of Wisconsin found that “Leaving your devices behind and heading out into nature can also be calming for more metaphysical reasons...” the study “found that a natural environment allowed people to leave the stressors of their everyday lives behind and instead focus their minds on something more pure. By centering your mind, you can relax your body” (Mental floss).

Lesson includes the following nature based activities:

- Nature walk
- Nature object observation activity through Wonder Wheel
- Drawing of a nature object

Social-Emotional Health Resources and Connection for Lesson: Nature Soothes

University of Minnesota found that “Nature helps us cope with pain. Because we are genetically programmed to find trees, plants, water, and other nature elements engrossing, we are absorbed by nature scenes and distracted from our pain and discomfort” (Larson & Kreizer, 2016).

Lesson includes the following nature based activities:

- Youth interact with nature through a wonder wheel activity and a nature walk. The lesson includes nature themed activity to create ease and comfort before discussing harder topics related to military life.

Educators Support Social-Emotional Development:

Professionals need to understand the importance of SEL to create, facilitate, and cultivate a way for youth to learn social-emotional skills as well as be aware of youth who may be struggling to connect socially. “Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success.” (Committee of Children, 2020).

Below are thoughts to consider when carrying out the lesson and throughout your whole 4-H program or installation youth program.

1. Teach social-emotional skills
 - a. Create and use targeted lesson plans
 - i. There are curriculums that specifically teach SEL.
 - b. Lead by example



- c. Tend to group and individual needs
 - i. Small group discussions are effective for non-aggressive students, because the group provides an example of social supports and positive peer interactions.
 - ii. Recognize when youth need support.
 - iii. Incorporate a military family life counselor when appropriate and when permission is given.
 - d. Teach youth how to recognize when peers are being isolated and how to be socially responsive.
2. Orchestrate a youth program that promotes positive and inclusive interactions
 - a. Create activities and events that promote inclusion.
 - b. Create activities that promote groups that support youth and family development.
 - c. Tend to group and individual needs to maintain positive interactions along with ensuring an environment of inclusion.
 3. Staff should promote and assist youth with establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding diverse relationships with peers and groups.
 - a. Technology is assisting military teens to stay connected with peers and social groups
 - b. Technology allows youth who are socially isolated at school, to create connections through online gaming and social media sites.



Pennsylvania State University created the above infographic as a tool for professionals.



Why Social-Emotional Education:

- Peer relationships provide a unique context in which children learn a range of critical social-emotional skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving strategies.
- Social-Emotional development promote understanding of others perspective, feelings, and the personal problem solving.
- “In Adolescence, peer relations play a strong role in determining youth’s sense of social belonging and self-worth” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018).
- “Positive peer relations in middle childhood significantly predict... quality in early adulthood work competence, including interactive effectively on the job and having harmonious relationships with coworkers” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018).

Social-Emotion Connection to the Family:

According to issue brief *With A Little Help from My Friends: The Importance of Peer Relationships For Social-Emotional Development* suggests that there is “considerable promise in the potential for families to help support children struggling with peer difficulties” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018). Social-emotion education is important for schoolteachers, 4-H leaders, childcare and youth directors, and the parents. Parents who understand and are skilled at social-emotion can better support their children. The research suggests, “positive skills and peer relationship outcomes were found for children whose parents had learned how to create a positive relationship with their children and then how to support their children in relating to peers” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018). Therefore, in many ways, children and youth professionals need to coach the parent and children. As professionals, we must continue to “coach” youth throughout all programming efforts, as this is not a one-time lesson or experience.

Additional Resources for Professionals

Resources and/or websites to support social-emotional learning for professionals

- <https://www.brightfutures.org/tools/BFtoolsAD.pdf>
- https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/Report_SEL%20Practices.pdf
- <https://www.ecmhc.org/ideas/index.html>
- <https://www.selpractices.org/about>
- https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4868_7145_64838---,00.html

How to strengthen youth skills in the area of emotions

- http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm
- <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/fostering-healthy-mental-emotional-and-behavioral-development-among-children-and-youth>
- <https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/news/social-and-emotional-learning>