

**Applied Learning Session:
Disability and Ways of
Being in Nature**

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What to Expect

This Zine's Approach

Purpose, background, and learning goals of the zine

Reflection Activity


Create a representation of your "way of being" in nature

Disability Perspectives

Firsthand account of a way of being in nature centered around disability

Application to Practice

Reflect on what ways. of being in nature are represented in a lesson plan, activity, or program





This Zine's Approach

Human beings vary in the ways they look, think, speak, move, and behave. This variation is natural and advantageous for individuals and communities.

Social, cultural, and historical factors privilege certain bodies and minds over others that fall outside of a desired "norm." Our systems and institutions are built around people whose bodies and minds fall within that "norm."

Disabled people are "included" into those systems often on a case-by-case basis. However, once admitted, many find that what they've been "included" into is centered around norms that are grounded in a nondisabled experience of society and nature.

If a building has a ramp to its entrance but its interior is only filled with stairs, the disabled person technically has "access" to the building - but the building is still fundamentally built around the needs and priorities of nondisabled people. They are kept, literally and figuratively, on the ground floor of participation in society.

This zine asks the question:

When we speak of disability inclusion in environmental education, what are we "including" disabled people into?

What ways does environmental education keep disabled students on the ground floor?

This zine asserts that disabled people can have unique and varied ways of relating to and being in the natural world – **a way of being** – that may be distinct from nondisabled people.

Disabled ways of being in nature are valuable for individuals, communities, and our knowledge of the environment. Because disability encompasses many different experiences, these ways of being are diverse. Some examples can include norms and values such as slowness, stillness, flexibility with timing and objectives, and rest.





Often, environmental education is not developed with disabled ways of being in nature in mind. Things like paved trails and accessible facilities may get some disabled people to the ground floor, but they'll be kept to that ground floor as long as program structure, policies, and activities require them to assimilate into nondisabled ways of being in nature. And that may come at great mental, emotional, or physical cost.

Instead of baseline access, the goal should be fostering and sustaining a sense belonging. In order for that to happen, disabled ways of being in nature should not be limited to add-on or "special" options – but should be among the many fundamental ways we teach students about being in nature.

In this zine, you will...



Draw out, identify, and represent what your way of being in nature is, and consider how it impacts your lesson and activity choices

Have an example of disabled ways of being in nature, and some of the values and norms the disability community brings to outdoor spaces

Examine a lesson and identify underlying assumptions and biases about ways of being in nature

Consider institutional barriers and assets that may help or constrain this process



Guiding Questions to Consider
Throughout the Zine

What is my way of being in nature?

What strengths does that way of being bring to myself, my community, and the pursuit of science?

What abilities and conditions enable that way of being?

What would happen if any of those abilities or conditions change?

How might my way of being bias me towards particular lessons, activities, and program designs?

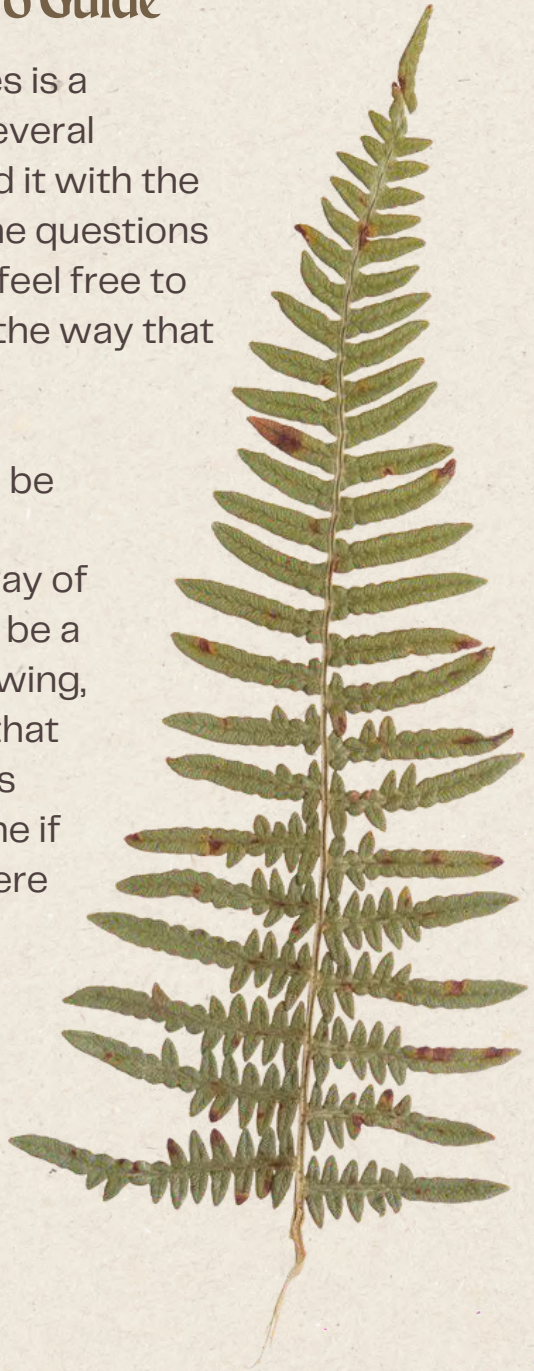


Reflection Activity: How-To Guide

On the next several pages is a reflection activity with several prompts. I have designed it with the intention of answering the questions one at a time – however, feel free to complete this activity in the way that works best for you.

In the beginning, you will be asked to create a representation of your way of being in nature – this can be a poem, a paragraph, a drawing, a recording, or anything that feels right to you! There is space set aside in this zine if you'd like to use pages here (but you do not have to!)

You can answer most of the following prompts by adding onto your representation.



“Ways of Being” Reflection Activity



Goal: Create a model or representation of your physical, mental, and behavioral way of being in nature, and identify what abilities and conditions it relies on.

Please work through these questions at your own pace!

1

Please take a moment to reflect on the situations in which you feel the greatest sense of enjoyment, connection, and/or belonging in nature. Where are you, and what are you doing?

Make a representation of the situation you imagined. You can write, draw, make a map, make a recording, etc as long as you can add on to it later! Show or describe what you are doing and where you are. You can use the next two blank pages for this if you'd like.

3

What abilities enable you to participate in that activity or moment of connection?

Think about physical, mental, emotional, and/or behavioral factors. Add these on to your representation.



4

What do you feel when you can be connected to nature in this way?

What kind of thoughts do you have? What do you think about?

Add your answers to your representation.





5

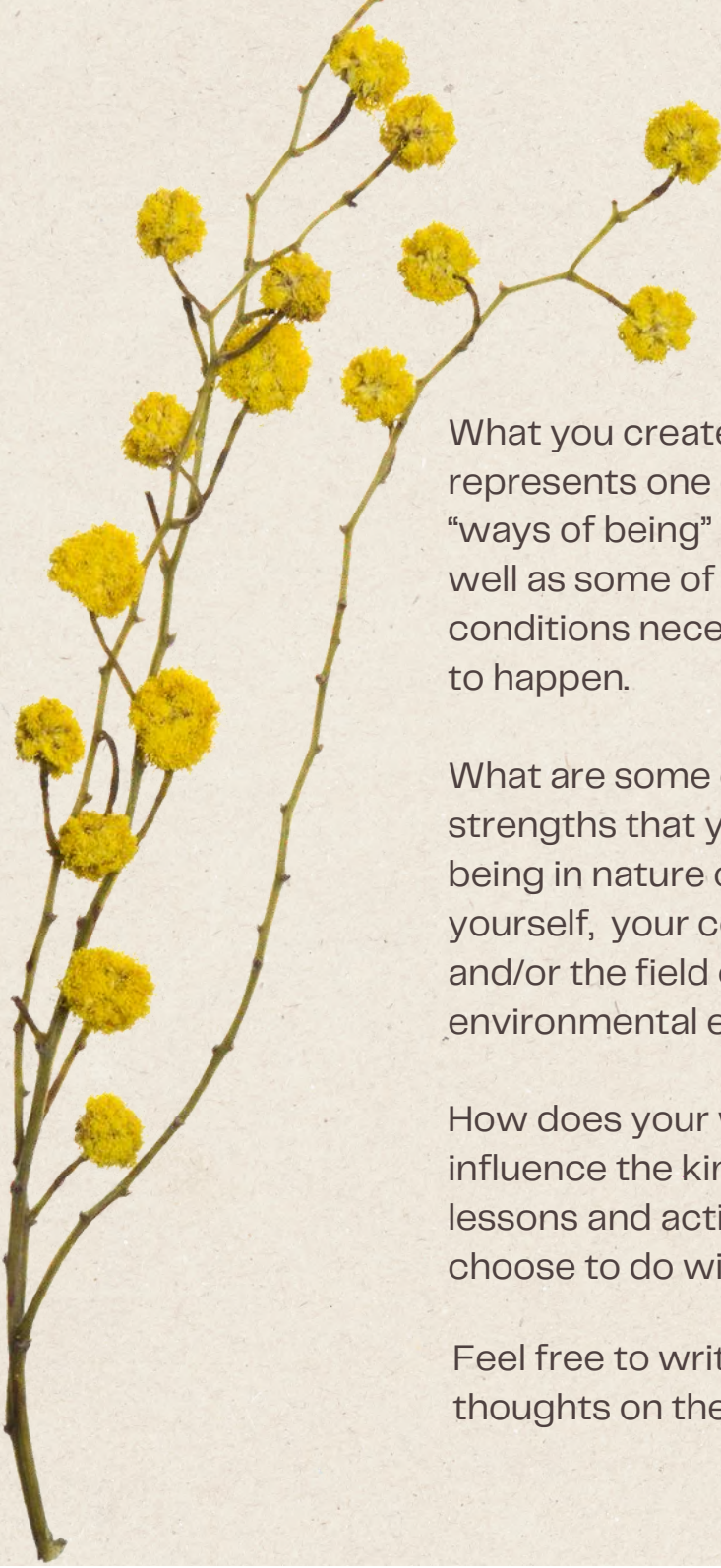
What social and environmental conditions are present in the situation you imaged? There are some examples below to get you started. Please answer by adding on to your representation!

Are you in community, or by yourself? Who, if any, are the people with you, and what are their identities in relation to your own?

Are you in your own community or neighborhood, or someplace else?

How do get there – by car, on foot, by plane, or using mobility equipment?

What is the temperature, terrain, and built environment like?



What you created represents one of your “ways of being” in nature, as well as some of the conditions necessary for it to happen.

What are some of the strengths that your way of being in nature offers to yourself, your community, and/or the field of environmental education?

How does your way of being influence the kinds of lessons and activities you choose to do with students?

Feel free to write down thoughts on the next page.

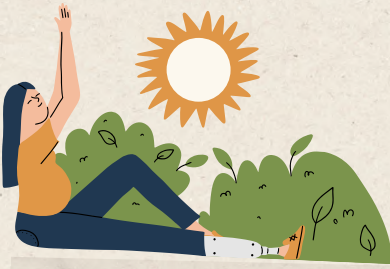


**What benefits does supporting multiple ways of
being in nature bring to environmental education?**

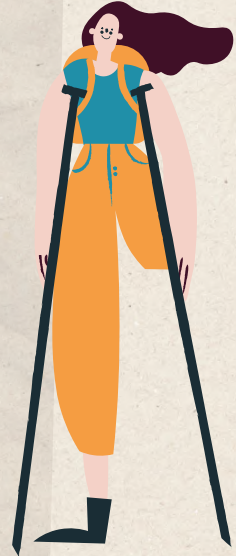


**What do we lose, as a community and as a field, when
only one way of being is supported and valued?**





“How might rethinking the compulsory able-bodiedness/sanist activities that continue to reinforce notions of nature as separate from humans and as needing certain bodies and minds to access and connect with it, open up new ways of understanding nature and our relationships to it?”



**-Jenne Schmidt in
“Crippling Environmental
Education” (2022)**



Disabled Ways of Being in Nature

We will be watching a short video called "Access Nature," produced by the Washington state disability advocacy group Rooted in Rights. The video focuses on Syren Nagakyrie, the founder of Disabled Hikers.

Please search "Access Nature Rooted in Rights" in YouTube to access the video.

As you watch the videos, consider the following prompts, and feel free to jot down notes on the next page.

How do you think this person would describe their way of being in nature? How is it similar/different from your own?

What can we learn from their approach?

What would an environmental education lesson or program centered around their way of being in nature look like?

How does the person in the video you watched describe the impact of not having their way of being in nature honored?





In Practice: Lessons

Please select a lesson plan (yours or somebody else's) that you would like to review. You can work individually, in pairs, or small groups. Feel free to reflect on the pages provided.

Here are some thoughts and questions to use to review the lesson plan:

- Identify what way of being in nature is assumed or centered. List what senses, ways of moving, and patterns of thinking and behaving are implicitly or explicitly expected.
 - If you are reviewing your own lesson: How does your way of being in nature show in the way you designed this lesson?
- How dependent is the success of the lesson on students having a particular mind, body, or way of being in nature?



In Practice: Lessons

- Which ways of being may be unsupported? Who might feel pressure to assimilate?
- Identify any attempts to acknowledge disability.
 - Is the lesson planned with the **expectation** that students will vary in body, mind, and ways of being in nature from the start?
 - Does the lesson offer multiple ways to participate?
 - Does the lesson describe ways the activity can be flexible or adapted? If so, are the alternatives offering disabled students the same depth of experience, meaning, and community? Or are they kept at the "ground floor"? (See page 2)
- How could you give students opportunities within the lesson to practice their way of being in nature?





In Practice: Institutions

Next, consider how your program or institution enables or constrains efforts to support diverse ways of being in nature. Feel free to use the next page for notes, if desired.

What ways of being in nature does your program or institution center their efforts around? What bodies and minds currently benefit the most?



What kinds of bodies and minds benefit the least? What policies, structures, or practices could be addressed to change this?

What partnerships could (or does) your program or institution engage in to support different ways of being in nature?





Readings and Resources

Books

Disability Visibility edited by Alice Wong

Care Work by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Sustaining Disabled Youth: Centering Disability in Asset Pedagogies edited by Federico R. Waitoller and Kathleen A. King Thorius

A Disability History of the United States by Kim Nielsen

Feminist, Queer, Crip by Alison Kafer

The Future is Disabled by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha



Readings and Resources

Articles

"Risking bodies in the wild: The "corporeal unconscious" of American adventure culture"
by Sarah Jaquette Ray (2009)

"Crippling environmental education: rethinking disability, nature, and interdependent futures"
by Jenne Schmidt (2022)

"Disability Justice: An Audit Tool" by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2020)

"To Survive Climate Catastrophe, Look to Queer and Disabled Folks" by Vanessa Raditz and Patty Berne (2019)

"Ableism Enables All Forms of Inequity and Hampers All Liberation Efforts" by George Yancy and Talila A. Lewis (2023)