
Title	Education-without-classrooms
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Source	<i>Teaching and Learning, 17(1),30-34</i>
Published by	Institute of Education (Singapore)

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Education-Without-Classrooms

TAN WEE KIAT

"Education-without-classrooms? Did I see it right?" This is probably what crossed your mind. Yes! You did see correctly. Do not be alarmed by these words though; it is not so revolutionary as it sounds. Education-WITHOUT-classrooms simply refers to the educational opportunities OUTSIDE classrooms as a supplement and complement to education that goes on WITHIN classrooms. Nowadays, many schools have incorporated activities outside the classroom such as overseas study tours, local field trips to various places (Zoo, Bird Park, Sentosa, Science Centre), camps, visits to old folks' homes, etc., into their programmes. Such activities complement and supplement the learning that goes on within the classroom.

However, the use of study tours, field trips, camping, and visits require a substantial amount of effort in planning and implementation - parental consent, arrangements for transport, raising funds and other nitty-gritty. The 'education-without-classrooms' activity that is advocated here is a much simpler undertaking. It does not require parental consent as it is carried out WITHIN the school compound. No funds need to be raised, no transport arrangements need to be made, and usually the activity can be completed in about 90 minutes. Of course, it will take hours of planning and preparation beforehand.

The activity described here, which may need to be modified for pupils from different levels, is in the area of science. With appropriate adaptations the idea can be used for mathematics education (e.g., mathematics trail) and language education/social studies (e.g., topics on environmental matters). Pupils generally enjoy these 'education-without-classrooms' activities very much as there is a kind of 'treasure hunt/detective work' atmosphere generated in the process.

In carrying out the activity for a whole class, subdivide the class into small groups with four to six pupils in a group. Assign a number to each group, appoint a group leader, and request the groups to

start with the question corresponding to their number. Hence, Group No.1 starts with Question 1, Group No.2 starts with Question 2, and so on. This way there will not be a situation where the whole class starts with Question 1 and thereby cause a 'traffic jam' right at the start of the activity. Supply each group with one copy of the question paper and emphasise that the members of the group must co-operate with each other to complete all the questions.

Expect some excitement, squabbling and noise when the activity is in progress. If it is the first time you are trying such an activity with your class, you may want to choose a time that is more tolerable to other teachers such as a Saturday morning.

The 'education-without-classrooms' session can be followed up with 'education-within-classrooms' lessons based on what the pupils have experienced from this hands-on activity.

An example of the instructions and questions used in an actual 'education-without-classrooms' session is given here.

EDUCATION-WITHOUT-CLASSROOMS: NATURE'S TREASURES

Answer all the 10 questions. You can discuss your answers with the other members of your group. All the items mentioned in the questions are found WITHIN the school compound.

Remember that it is more important to be correct than to be fast. Work as a team and help your group leader.

1. I am a bush with yellow trumpet-shaped flowers. My flowers are attractive, bright and good to look at but they are poisonous.

What am I?

Answer: _____

.....

2. You can find me under the MacArthur Palms. Mono-coloured, small and soft I have lots of chlorophyll and I can make my own food. My name is a four-letter word.

What am I? Answer: _____

Put a small piece (fifty-cent coin size) of me into the plastic bag provided and give it to the teacher.

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3. I am a bush with green simple leaves whose edges are jagged. My flowers are bright red with long prominent styles. I am Malaysia's national flower.

What am I? Answer: _____

Bring a leaf to show to the teacher.

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4. I am a weed. My seeds get into the fur of animals and clothes of people. That is how they are dispersed. I have pink flowers and am extremely sensitive to touch.

What am I? Answer: _____

.....

5. Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink - that's my habitat. I am partially submerged and part of me floats on water. People may think I am a banana but I am not. My roots look like tiny bananas.

What am I? Answer: _____

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6. Some people wonder why I have no branches. My big simple leaves grow straight from the trunk. I reproduce by suckers. Every part of me is useful to man. What am I? Draw a picture of my leaf in the space below.

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7. I am a weed commonly found in fields and by the side of roads and drains. I have small purplish flowers and the wind helps to disperse my seeds. Mispronounce me and you get a girl's name "Veronica".

Who am I? Answer: _____

Bring a sample of me to the teacher.

.....

8. We are tall and provide shade. You will find us in the school field near the car park. My compound leaves have very small leaflets and my yellow flowers grow in clusters. My seed pods are brown when ripe.

What am I? Answer: _____

Make a bark rubbing of me in the space below.

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9. I am a tree with orange flowers which later grow into rocket-shaped seed pods, pointing towards the sky. When ripe, the seed pods split and the wind carries the seeds away.

What am I? Answer: _____

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10. Water collects in between my branches. The Ministry of Environment workers dislike me but mosquitoes love me. Travellers of long ago loved me too as I provided them with water.

What am I? Answer: _____

Draw me in the space below.

.....

Note:

The ten items are:

- Allamanda.
- 2. Moss (many of the pupils will state 'fern' instead).
- 3. Hibiscus.
- Mimosa.
- Water Banana.
- Banana.
- 7. Vernonia.
- 8. Yellow Flame.
- African Tulip (no relation to the famous Holland tulips).
- 10. Traveller's Palm.

Reference

Tan, W. K. (1994) **The "Outdoors" Classroom.** *Teaching & Learning.* vol 15, no.1, pp 3-6.