

Overview

In this outdoor learning activity, learners will solve messy playground problems by building solutions! Whether in fall, winter, or spring, learners will identify areas in their outdoor spaces in which seasonal changes affect the ability to get around. Using natural materials, learners may embark on constructing bridges, paths, tunnels, or water collectors – so that all learners can move and play together!

NB Curricular Connections

3-5 Learning Areas

English Language Arts:

- *Strand: Interactions - Big Idea: Expression – Skill Descriptor: Express and discuss thoughts, feelings, experiences, ideas, and opinions, and consider those of their peers.*
- *Strand: Reading - Big Idea: Reading Comprehension – Skill Descriptor: Connect and respond personally and critically to text.*

Mathematics:

- *Strand: Shape and Space - Big Idea: Measurement*

Personal Wellness:

- *Strand: Wellness - Big Idea: Personal Safety*

What You'll Need

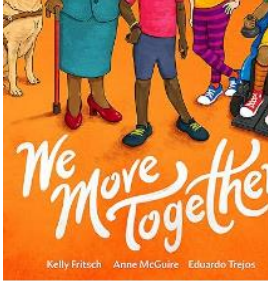
- Book – *We Move Together* (by: Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, and Eduardo Trejos)
- Our Outdoor Spaces Inventory Printable (1 per small group)
- Outdoor Building Solutions printable (1 per small group)
- Pencils
- Clipboard (1 per small group)
- Twine or thick string (some per group, optional)
- Natural materials (sticks, leaves, stones, brush, snow, etc.)
- Mini Shovels (optional)

Instructions

Please note: This activity is intended to be provided in an outdoor learning environment, however, feel free to adapt and change to meet the needs of your learners and outdoor spaces.

1. **Outdoor Expectations:** If students have not had much outdoor learning experience, before heading outdoors, discuss with learners the difference between learning inside of

the classroom vs. outdoors. Using a piece of chart paper, co-construct 4-5 learning expectations for outdoor learning. (*Examples: We will respect all living things. We will not leave behind any materials that might harm living things, etc.*) Have learners print their name on the expectations chart, as a symbol of their commitment to following them, to the best of their ability.

2. **PREP and STEP:** Divide learners into small groups of your desired size. Each group needs: a clipboard, a pencil, an *Our Outdoor Spaces Inventory & Outdoor Building Solutions* printable, and outdoor attire. Learners can place all the printed sheets onto a clipboard. Once groups have all their materials, have them STEP in line and follow you (*with the Read Aloud, twine and optional shovels*) to the desired outdoor location.
3. **Read Aloud – *We Move Together*:** Ask learners: “*How did we move to get to this exact spot? Were there any specific places along our route that were more difficult traveling on than others and why?*” Allow learners to share their mode of movement, as well as spots that were more challenging to navigate (*tree roots, uneven ground, mud puddles to get around, a snowdrift, etc.*) Be mindful to include other modes of movement if all students walked on their feet (such as: wheelchairs, braces, walkers, crutches, etc.) Then, read the book. Discuss: “*What stood out to you in the text or illustrations about the action of “move”?* How does this story change the way you think about how we move together?”
4. **Our Outdoor Spaces Inventory:** Using the printable provided, have learners sketch out a bird’s eye-view map of their outdoor spaces, with the school building being clearly visible. Have them include pathways, playground areas, outdoor classrooms, and sports fields. Then, give time for learners to survey the grounds, ensuring accuracy of their map, as well as looking for potential areas where mobility may be affected due to seasonal changes (mud, excess water, excess wind and snowdrifts, steps) or simply the natural landscape. Have learners identify these areas on their map by circling them.
5. **Discussion:** Come together, as a whole class, and allow learners to share their findings. Ask: *What did you discover? Are there multiple areas that need a building solution? Is there one area that stood out to your group more than others? What seasonal changes, barriers, or natural landscape issues did we notice around our outdoor spaces? Are there other environmental factors affecting these areas (soil erosion, wind, changes in temperature, etc.)?* Re-read pages 16-19 of *We Move Together* – “*We notice when things are unfair, and it helps us get creative. We make plans. We solve problems. We build something better.*” Determine that this is our goal.

6. **Outdoor Building Solutions:** Choose the best option for your group of learners -
 a) complete a building solution for one identified problem area as a whole class OR
 b) determine a few problem areas and have learners work in small groups. Once decided, have learners begin to plan their outdoor building solution. Using the template provided below, learners can take inventory of what they have to work with, as well as sketch out an initial building plan with approximate measurements. Have groups share with other groups before building, for feedback and suggestions. Here are some possible solutions to help guide your learners:

Possible Seasonal Changes, Barriers, or Landscape Issues:	Possible Building Solutions:	
Muddy Areas (seasonal or due to poor water drainage)	Sticks of similar size laid out like a wooden mat to avoid the mud (rope can also be used to tie them together).	
Springtime Streams (melting snow, icy patches)	Build a dam with rocks and sticks and divert water to another location (using similar materials, if needed).	
Uneven ground		Using dirt, pebbles, or sand, add to uneven pathways and smooth with shovels. Even use a level to check your work.
Deep Snow Mounds		Snow Forts using natural snow bricks or make your own. Trample down snow in these spaces so all can get in and get out.

7. **Build It & Check It:** Allow learners to build their building solutions! When finished, collect data as you periodically check on the solutions for wear and tear, maintenance, feedback from other classes, and any weather damage. After 2-3 weeks, what is the data telling you? What information have you gathered? Has the building solution been a success? Could it be improved?

8. **Real Life Builders:** Discuss with students the various community members who build solutions everyday (carpenters, landscapers, maintenance workers, safety inspectors, etc.). Invite a local expert to come and see your own creations and give feedback.

Extension Ideas

- Partner with a Middle School or High School Shop Class to build more permanent solutions.
- Needing more than natural materials for safety reasons? (Particularly for wheelchair ramps or accessibility access) – why not fundraise to purchase the materials and ask local experts on the best solutions. Be a voice for all students!
- Looking at the messy outdoor areas – research the soil compositions and types of rock that are present around the school grounds. Other solutions could come from this research.
- Investigate and research the rights and responsibilities of citizens – particularly in relation to accessibility and mobility in schools and in your community.

Reflection Activity

Please see the attached PDF for several choices on how you and your learners can reflect upon today's activity.

Acknowledgements

1. Learning Through Landscapes: <https://ltl.org.uk/resources/dam-building/>, 2023.
2. Go Explore Nature: <https://goexplore nature.com/2012/06/backyard-play-spaces-dirt-pile.html>, 2012.
3. Childhood By Nature: <https://www.childhoodbynature.com/build-the-ultimate-snow-fort/>, 2018.

Global Competencies



Collaboration



Communication



**Critical
Thinking &
Problem-
Solving**



**Innovation,
Creativity &
Entrepreneurship**



**Sustainability
and Global
Citizenship**



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Our Outdoor Spaces Inventory

Name(s): _____

Using a bird's-eye view, sketch out your school building and its surrounding outdoor spaces. Be sure to include walkways, paths, playground areas, sport fields, and outdoor classrooms.

Now, after walking around the grounds, circle problem areas – places where seasonal changes, natural landscape, or barriers, make it challenging for all learners to enjoy and get around.



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Outdoor Building Solutions

Name(s): _____

Our Problem Area: _____

Take a few minutes exploring your outdoor space. List as many natural items that you have to work with:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> _____ | <input type="radio"/> _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> _____ | <input type="radio"/> _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> _____ | <input type="radio"/> _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> _____ | <input type="radio"/> _____ |

Our Building SOLUTION: *(include approximate measurements of cm or m)*

What other materials are needed to complete our idea? _____

Circle one: Is this a temporary OR permanent solution? Why? _____

Is there a bigger dream? _____