The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

**Core Skill Sets:**
These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at [www.we.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/](http://www.we.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/).

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS**

The new trend of forest bathing uses all five senses and promises to reduce stress. (Photo: Karen Bleier, Getty Images)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**
- Canada has more than 3.4 million square kilometres of forests—nine percent of the world’s entire forest cover. ([Natural Resources Canada](https://www.nrcan.gc.ca))
- There are 180 different species of tree that are native to Canada. ([Tree Canada](https://www.treecanada.com))
- The term “tree-hugger”—often used to refer to environmentalists and people who love nature—was first coined in 1730 when hundreds of people in a village in India wrapped their arms around trees in their village to try and stop them from being cut down and used to build a palace. Unfortunately, most of them were murdered by the foresters who had come to cut down the trees. ([Green Grounds—University of Virginia](https://greengrounds.org))
- Researchers at Stanford University found that a 90-minute walk in a wooded area showed significantly less activity in parts of the brain linked to depression, compared to people who took a 90-minute walk in a city area. ([Stanford University](https://www.stanford.edu))
- People who live in urban areas have a 20 percent higher risk of anxiety and a 40 percent higher risk of mood disorders like depression than people who live in rural areas. ([Stanford University](https://www.stanford.edu))
- A survey of 31,000 people in 3,000 Ontario neighbourhoods found that planting 10 more trees on a city block had the same impact on the health of the people living there as if every household on the street was earning $10,200 more in income. ([National Post](https://nationalpost.com))
- Studies conducted in numerous cities across the United States found that urban neighbourhoods with more trees and grass cover had significantly lower rates of property crime like vandalism and theft, and lower rates of domestic and public violence. ([University of Washington](https://www.washington.edu))

**KEY TERMS**

- **Therapy**—A course of treatment to care, heal or help relieve an illness, injury, or other physical or mental health condition.
- **Tree density**—The number of trees within a specific defined area, for example per square kilometre.
- **Prescription**—An instruction from a medical professional that allows a patient to be given a medicine or other form of medical treatment.
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

• Themes: Environment, Health, Local Issues, Values and Ethics
• Course Connections: Language, Health and Physical Education

MATERIALS

• Front board
• Paper and writing utensils
• Computer/tablet with Internet access and video capability

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

• Create links between a current issue and personalize to self
• Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information
• Participate in active group work and class discussions
• Communicate effectively in writing, orally and visually
• Demonstrate the ability to think critically

DISCUSS

1. Why is a walk in the woods good for physical and mental health? How often are you able to take a walk in the woods or a wooded area? How often do you walk in a wooded area?
2. How do you feel when you spend time in nature or in space where trees are prominent? What keeps you from spending more time in these spaces?
3. What is forest bathing? What are the benefits of forest bathing?
4. Why are trees so valuable? Discuss monetary value, social value, environmental value, etc.
5. Why is it important that green spaces and parks are accessible?
6. In your opinion, does your community (town or city and province) have enough trees and public green spaces? Explain your answer.

DIVE DEEPER

1. Using the think-pair-share strategy, ask students to explore the consequences of not going outside. Read the following scenario to students:

Samuel works at a company for eight hours each weekday. He sits in the basement of the building and only goes outside to buy lunch or snacks. He only stands up and leaves his desk if he needs to use the bathroom or throw away garbage. During the day the only sunlight or time in a green space he enjoys is the short walk between his home, public transit and his workplace. During the winter months it is often dark when he leaves his home for work in the morning and when he returns home from work in the evening. Outside of work he regular exercises at an indoor gym three times a week.

2. Ask students:
   a. How can Samuel increase his time outside during the day?
   b. Why is this important and beneficial for Samuel?
   c. How does sunlight and time in nature help the human body?
3. Share the video “What if you stopped going outside” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmqgulFMC-Y (3:05). Ask students to think about Samuel. What effects will a lack of interaction with nature have on his body and mind? In groups of three, brainstorm examples of how Samuel can change his daily routine to increase his engagement with nature and how will this impact his body and mind?
4. In the same groups, ask students to think about their daily routine. How much do they interact with nature during the day? How can they increase this amount of time to benefit their health? Instruct students to create a list of five ways of how to increase their time in nature and the benefits they might expect from doing so.
5. Next have students consider the outdoor spaces available for them to use on the school grounds or a green space in the community. If possible, take a tour of the space and have students answer the following questions while they are experiencing the benefits and barriers to the outdoors.
   a. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the experience of the outdoor space. Why did you give it this rating?
   b. What are the benefits or positive attributes of this green space? What is missing or what are the drawbacks of this green space?
   c. During what seasons is the green space usable? Is there a way to make it more accessible year-round?
   d. How accessible is the green space? Who might not be able to access and enjoy the benefits of the space? How can we help break down these barriers?
   e. What would make this space healthier for those who use it? Provide specific examples keeping in mind suggestions and information from the Global Voices article
6. Applying information from the Global Voices article, the video and their own preferences, instruct students to design their ideal outdoor space. This space might be a school space, public space or a private space. The space may be designed on a piece of paper, in a digital space or as a diorama.
7. In addition to the visual representation of their ideal outdoor space, students must explain their reasons for their design either orally or in a written explanation. Have students share their designs with the class and, if possible, the school community.

Resources