

TAKING TO NATURE IN A “BIOBLITZ”

A kindergarten teacher takes students outdoors to observe their natural surroundings, using Twitter to share what they see.

BY STEFAN DUBOWSKI



Laurel Fynes, OCT, participates in a global Twitter activity to teach young students about nature.

THE CHALLENGE: Help students appreciate nature so they understand the value of protecting it.

THE SOLUTION: Take part in **#KindergartenBioBlitz**: a global Twitter activity (started in Ontario) in which kindergarteners and teachers explore nature around their schools and share their observations.

LESSONS LEARNED: Laurel Fynes, OCT, grew up in rural Ontario (between Cookstown and Gilford), surrounded by nature: a swimmable pond with visiting herons and minks, and a burgeoning forest nearby. She learned to appreciate the environment and the importance of protecting it. Now a kindergarten teacher, Fynes always looks for ways to help her students connect with their natural surroundings.

Since 2014, she and her classes have participated in **#KindergartenBioBlitz**. It's a weeklong activity in which teachers take students outdoors to explore. Using

the hashtag **#KindergartenBioBlitz**, they share photos of their findings — be they insects, animals, plants or land formations — as well as thoughts about them.

Participants also interact with “Ranger” Rob Ridley, field centres co-ordinator for the Peel District School Board. Ridley instigated **#KindergartenBioBlitz** in 2013. Now he spearheads the activity three times a year: the first full week of school in September, the last full week in February and the first full week of June. Ridley has seen classes across the country participate, and some from other nations including Singapore, Cambodia, Brazil, the United States and Australia.

The sessions go like this: each day of the week, Ridley introduces a prompt for the participating classes to consider, such as “I predict ...,” “I notice ...” and “I wonder ...” Teachers use them to provide a framework for their outdoor explorations and discussions. Several times a day, Fynes and her crew of four- and five-year-olds at Fairview Public School

YOU CAN DO IT TOO!

What You'll Need:

a class Twitter account, a mobile communications device such as smartphone or tablet

Steps to Take:

- 1) Read Participating in **#KindergartenBioBlitz** at oct-oeeo.ca/bioblitz, which tells you everything you need to know about taking part.
- 2) Get outside!
- 3) Tweet your class's observations of nature around your school. Add “**#KindergartenBioBlitz**” to your tweets so others can see what you've found.
- 4) Follow the **#KindergartenBioBlitz** hashtag to learn from other classes' observations.

in Mississauga grab their “go bag” (filled with things like magnifiers, pouches for leaf specimens and “bug jugs”) and the wonder wagon (with clipboards, pencils and paper, which the children can use to draw their observations). Then they head out to see what they might find in the meadow adjacent to the school.

OBSERVATIONS: Fynes says the activity is especially helpful for youngsters who don't have access to green space at home. “Even if you can't have it outside your door, you know that when you come to school, you're going to get to know the trees and the plants. It's important to learn to love what's around you so you take care of it.”

Fynes finds it worthwhile to take part in all three BioBlitzes each year, noting that her students also learn from other participants. The first session introduces children to the idea, so by the second session, they're more likely to speak up with their own predictions, observations and questions. **PS**

The College's professional advisory Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media (oct-oeeo.ca/ecom) guides members' professional judgment in the use of technology.

HELPFUL HINT: Whether you're new to **#KindergartenBioBlitz** or well versed, it pays to follow the question-prompts that “Ranger” Rob Ridley uses throughout the activity to help frame discussions with students.