

**ASSIGNMENT TEMPLATE**

# **THE NATURE EXPERIMENT**

# Assignment template

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# WHAT IS THE NATURE EXPERIMENT?

The Nature Experiment is a reflective journaling project that explores the connection between humans, the natural world, our food system, and our reliance upon technology. The project, initially designed for university students, provides a creative outlet for connecting lived experiences to the sociological and structural issues discussed over the course of a year. The format encourages artistic, multimedia responses and culminates with the creation of either a paper portfolio or a digital portfolio (that can be published on a project website).

I have utilised The Nature Experiment in upper level courses on the Sociology of the Family paired with Richard Louv's, *Last Child in the Woods* (2008) and E.O. Wilson's *Biophilia* (1984) but the project could easily be utilised in most social science courses.

Students overwhelmingly love this project and tend to go far beyond the expectations outlined for them. One student created a song which sampled the sounds of birdsong, appropriately blending the analog and digital worlds we inhabit. Another said, "The Nature Experiment was one of the best, most fulfilling assignments of my college career."



A Valley Oak tree at Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill, Victoria Australia 2020

## WHO CAN USE THIS?

- **University teachers:** For university students, it is best utilised as an end of semester capstone project that will allow for application of deeper sociological thinking. This timing is also optimal for trust to have been built so students feel comfortable in sharing personal reflections with the instructor.
- **Secondary school teachers:** Paired with readings about ecology, sustainability, food systems, and biophilia, The Nature Experiment can be adapted for students of various ages or academic levels.
- **Camp and workshop leaders:** The project can be adapted for brevity and immediacy when working with younger participants and should follow brief discussions of ecology, sustainability, and technology over reliance.

## TIPS

- Completing The Nature Experiment reflections alongside students and sharing your own reflections will build a sense of trust and increase the quality of the reflections.
- Creating an opportunity for publication of the journals on a project website acts as a motivating factor for many students who are eager to see their work in a public forum. Students should be reminded they can opt out of this publication option. Any student wishing to share their content online should sign a basic consent form that gives permission to share personal photos and creative content online.

## WEBSITE CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

### General Use Authorization Form

Specific Project: The Nature Experiment Website

I, (print full name) \_\_\_\_\_ (\*) hereby grant permission to \_\_\_\_\_ and its affiliates and subsidiaries, including but not limited to \_\_\_\_\_ to utilise my photographs and/or videos on The Nature Experiment website and in educational and promotional activities for the following without compensation:

- ✓ University Electronics Publishing (e.g. World Wide Web)
- ✓ Local/regional/national news media (w/permission of \_\_\_\_\_)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

### **Name and mailing address (please print)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*If the individual to be interviewed, photographed and/or videotaped is under the age of 18, please indicate your relationship or authority to consent:** \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# ASSIGNMENT TEMPLATE

## The Nature Experiment: Exploring Nature and Technology in our Daily Lives

**Due:** \_\_\_\_\_ by email or \_\_\_\_\_ by hand

**Overview:** This experiment takes the form of 4 creative journal style reflections that incorporates concepts from our class and from Louv's book, *The Last Child in the Woods* (insert your text/s here). The combined journals will result in a project that can be shared on our website.

### Requirements:

- Each of the four topics should be addressed fully in a personal reflection of **no less than 500 words each**.
- You may choose to create an **electronic journal or an analog paper journal**. If you choose the latter, please clearly photograph or scan your pages and submit them on Blackboard.
- List the word count at the end of the reflection **in order to receive credit**.
- Supplement each reflection with **a creative element**: a digital photo, a sketch, cut-outs from a magazine, or a creative writing piece like a haiku or poem. (We will discuss these in class with examples. Contact me if you need help.)
- **Email me each entry** as you do them for review before you turn in the finished project.

### Tips:

- Approaching this like a daily journal entry for the dates I suggest below will give you ample time to finish this before it is due. Do not wait until the day before it is due to finish this. The goal of this project is your deep reflection and that can't be rushed.
- At minimum, you must address the prompts fully. Feel free to be more creative and incorporate found items into your journal (leaves, acorns, real photos, magazine cut-outs, dried flowers, etc).
- I will be doing this activity alongside you and posting my work in our Nature Experiment Blackboard folder as an example to give you ideas. Please feel free to take this project in exciting directions!



## TOPIC 1- YOU AND NATURE

(Suggested completion date \_\_\_\_\_)

**Fully address, in no less than 500 words, your past and present experiences with nature (the natural world) and the outdoors.**

- What do you consider “nature” and the “natural world”? How did you and your family engage in the natural world while you were a child? What did you do most often? How did it shape you as a person?
- What are your current experiences with nature? How often do you find yourself in the outdoors for enjoyment or relaxation?
- Include old or new photos, images from the Internet of your favorite spot, a sketch, a poem or other creative writing.

## TOPIC 2- A SNAPSHOT OF TECHNOLOGY USE

(Suggested completion date \_\_\_\_\_)

**Fully address, in no less than 500 words, your reliance on technology for one day.**

- Reflect upon your use of technology by keeping track of how many times in one day you logged on to any online account, sent a text, chatted on the phone, or spent time gaming or scrolling. Include the time you spent researching for school or using a computer for school.
- Do you think your usage was too much, too little, or just right?
- Do you notice any shifts in your mood on days when you’re “plugged in” more? Do you notice shifts in your mood on days you are outside and “unplugged” more?
- Include old or new photos, images from the Internet of your favorite gadget or a snapshot of your blog/Facebook page/Twitter account, a sketch, a poem or other creative writing.

### TOPIC 3- DISCONNECTIONS

(Suggested completion date \_\_\_\_\_)

**Fully address, in no less than 500 words, what you know about the food you ate over the course of one day.**

- List three food items you ate today and reflect upon where that food comes from. Is it from your state? Is it from another country? Is it organically produced or genetically modified? Who are the farmers? Who picks the fruit or vegetable? Can you easily find this information about its source?
- Have you ever grown vegetables, herbs, or flowers? If so, please explain what, why, and how.
- Has anyone in your family ever produced food in a home garden? If not, why do you think this is the case?
- Include old or new photos, images from the Internet of your favorite food product, a sketch, a poem or other creative writing.

### TOPIC 4- THE FUTURE AND YOU

(Suggested completion date \_\_\_\_\_)

**Fully discuss, in no less than 500 words, the state of exposure to nature you would like to have in your life and in the near future.**

- What are your predictions for the future of the natural world and for us humans within it? Do you think increasing your exposure to the natural world would be a good thing? Why or why not?
- If you already have, or plan to have children, why do you think it is necessary, or not, to encourage them to experience the outdoors and nature?
- Imagine you are a teacher, parent, or babysitter. Construct a quick activity a child of 7-10 years old could do that would get them outdoors and help them appreciate nature more.
- Include old or new photos, images from the Internet, a sketch of the activity, a poem or other creative writing.