**Meditation stations: an essaying lesson plan**

This lesson plan gives a traditional university class a chance to get outdoors on campus and write reflectively in a series of outdoor stations. This could be done as a class or assigned as homework.

1. Choose a series (4-6) of outdoor features on your campus that might be interesting for students to write about. You might choose these at random, or cluster them so they create a focus or theme.
   1. Random: These might be statues or other objects of art, decoration, or utility; interesting landscaping features, such as a small garden or an unusual tree; unique buildings or places that have meaning for the traditions of the university. For example, my campus has a statue of Massasoit, who was a Wampanogas Indian Chief who supposedly met the Pilgrims in what became Plymoth, Mass. We also have a round stone made by indigenous people in South America before Collumbus, a tunnel with interesting acoustics where students go to sing, and a duck pond near an arboretum.
   2. Focus or Theme: You could choose five trees from your university’s arboretum if you want to focus on botany, or a series of natural and man-made objects if you want to focus on the theme of the difference in esthetics between these two kinds of objects. Or you could have students people watch at various stations--the student center, a cafeteria, the library, the natural history museum.
2. Create a map or itinerary with descriptions of the writing prompt and the time to be spent at each station.
   1. Example #1: If I am focusing on “Interfaces between inside and out” I might send students to the atrium in the library, which is the main entrance; the greenhouses where plants are grown to transplant to the flowerbeds, the planetarium, the office of admissions. I might have students write to the following prompts: “

* How does this place function as an interface through which people go inside or out?
* What are the social, esthetic, and practical aspects of this interface?
* If you were the architect or planner, how would you redesign this interface?”
  1. Example #2. Assign students to visit 4-6 of the following trees:
* American Elm: By the “Enter to Learn” sign.
* American Sycamore: Northeast of the Marigold Mall (west of the Fletcher Building).
* Bald Cypress: Around the botany pond.
* Columnar White Oaks: Colonnade north of the Wilkinson Center.
* Dawn Redwood: North of the Grant Building.
* English Oak: North of the Visitors Center.
* Fremont Cottonwood: Southeast of the Smith Fieldhouse on the hillside.
* Weeping Beech: Northeast corner of the Jesse Knight Building.
* White Fir: Southeast corner of the Lee Library.
* Zelkova: North of the Wilkinson Center near the pedestrian overpass.

Ask them to write on questions like the following:

* What is the native homeland for each of these trees?
* What are the traits of the bark, branches, and leaves that show they are suited to those places?
* What thoughts come into your head when you sit under each tree and think of the homeland of that tree?
* What does it show about humans that we have the urge to collect?

1. Either at each station or at the end of the tour of the meditation stations, perhaps in the next class period, have the students share their writing and their discoveries in groups or with the whole class. The pattern is to
   1. Ask for volunteers to read outloud what they wrote
   2. Ask for brief discussion on what the person wrote, asking questions such as

* What details stood out to you from what X just read?
* What does this show you about X?
* What did you learn from this reading?
  1. Ask the whole group to write or talk about what they learned from this experience (integration).