

School Yard Taxonomy 101

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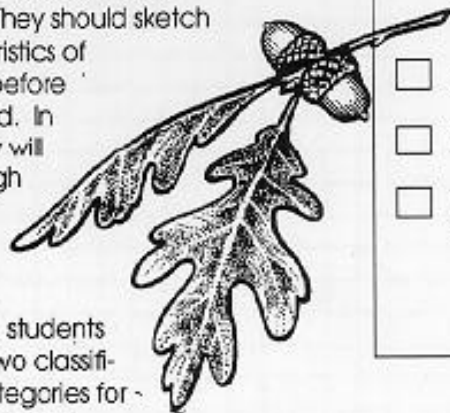


activity

Now that students have a basic understanding of how a key works, let them experiment with creating a very simple plant key. Tell them they are going to start working on a key to the trees and other plants around the school. Divide them into teams of three or four. Tell them they will do rough drafts of their keys in their field journals, then transfer their final copies onto large sheets of paper.

You should assign each team to a specific area in the school yard, but be sure there is a variety of plants with which each team can work. After studying the plants within their areas, the students will decide how to classify and identify each plant. Remind students to use their observation skills and their senses. They will first name large groups of plants that share common characteristics. Then they will go through the process of dividing each of these groups into subgroups, eventually getting

down to the identification of plant types. They should sketch the characteristics of each group before it is subdivided. In this way, they will create a rough draft of an identification key.



For example, students might have two classifications or categories for trees: "Trees whose leaves fall off in winter" and "evergreen trees." Then, within each classification, they sketch the trees' identifying characteristics. When the students have finished their rough drafts, check them to make sure they understand the assignment. Once back inside, give each team a large sheet of butcher paper. Let them draw and color their keys and display them on a wall.

Materials

- Student field journals
- Pencils
- Butcher paper or roll ends of newsprint