

Solo Spot



Overview: Solo spots provide learners with a designated time for observing and wondering about the natural world and/or reflecting and processing on the activities of the day. With guidance from an educator or caregiver, students pick a spot where they will be able to quietly and comfortably sit for the activity. Oftentimes, students return to the same special solo spot over time. Solo spot time may involve a guiding activity, such as writing or sketching, or allow for more unstructured activities like napping, yoga, and nature sculptures. You may choose to have a time afterwards for learners to share what they noticed, wondered, or reflected on during the solo spot.

Age Range: best for upper elementary through adult, but can be adapted for younger learners

Duration: 15-45 minutes, ideally repeated over time

Materials:

- notecards, journals or paper
- pencils or pens
- optional: sit pad or something else to make sitting more comfortable
- optional: tools for scientific inquiry (magnifying glass, binoculars, etc.)
- optional: tools for artistic expression (watercolors, colored pencils, markers)

Activity: In the simplest form of this, learner(s) first find a place to sit in an ecosystem. This spot should be safe, comfortable, and in a location where they can observe quietly without disrupting others. Try to choose a spot that they can revisit over time.

Note: It is great to have a solo spot location outdoors. However, this activity can also work if you have access to a window to observe weather and nature outside or if you can create a special, comfortable “nook” of interesting objects and things to look at. It is ideal if this indoor solo spot location can include living plants and natural objects such as shells, driftwood, rocks, etc. An open window, if possible, allows for observing sounds coming from both inside and outside the building. Whether the solo spot is outside or inside, try to find or create a place where the learner will have a little space and where it will be fairly quiet.

Once learner(s) have picked their spot, provide them with a notecard, journal or paper and a pencil/pen.

Explain that over the next 10-15 minutes, their job is to sit quietly and observe what is happening in and around their solo spot. This is also a time when they can reflect on what is going on in their life. They can write or draw in the journal if they would like, or just sit and relax and observe.

Note: For older learners, the time frame could be closer to 30-45 minutes. Follow their lead – if everyone still seems engaged after 15 minutes, you can extend the activity. For the youngest learners, it can be helpful for an adult to sit with them for the first few times. Sometimes, being able to move a little around a solo spot rather than sitting the whole time can be interesting and fun. You may want to put a limit on this movement, like venturing no more than 10 steps from the sitting spot.

There are many different approaches to a solo spot – some learners and educators like to focus on nature observation each time, some like to create art, some like to focus on relaxation and reflection, some like to choose a different theme each time. It is really up to you! After you finish with solo spot time, it is

great to provide an opportunity for everyone to share what they observed, noticed, wondered about, or experienced.

Here are some possible prompts and questions to consider during a solo spot activity:

- On your first solo spot, observe and pay attention to the nature surrounding you. Focus on both biotic (living or once-living parts of nature, like plants and birds and sticks) and abiotic (non-living parts of nature, like water and wind and rocks). In later solo spots, think about what has changed. Have leaf buds formed? Maybe flowers are blooming? Do you hear different sounds? Do you see evidence of different animals? How is the weather different?
- Keep a “perpetual nature journal.” Sketch, paint, or write about the landscape or small details of your solo spot each time you visit it.
- Comparisons! Notice opposites, such as start with something small and then something big. Something above you and then something below you. Close/far away. Green/brown. Wet/dry. Rough/smooth. Soft/hard. Curved/straight. Light/dark. Loud/quiet.
- 5 senses. Really pay attention with your senses, focusing on each sense for one or more minute. What do you smell? What do you hear? What do you see? What do you feel/touch? And (safely), what do you taste?
- “I notice..., I wonder..., It reminds me of...” These simple prompts from the BEETLES Project are a great structure for nature exploration. (<http://beetlesproject.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/I-Notice-I-Wonder-It-Reminds-Me-Of.pdf>)
- Breathing. There are a number of simple breathing techniques, such as box breathing (take a breath for 4-5 seconds, hold for 4-5 seconds, exhale for 4-5 seconds, hold for 4-5 seconds and repeat) that are great to try while relaxing in your solo spot location.
- Create nature art using found objects in your solo spot. Be respectful of the plants, animals, and land! Usually this means using non-living objects (like rocks) or already dead objects (like sticks and fallen leaves). Create a small sculpture at your spot. It can be temporary – maybe you even put the objects back where you found them after your solo spot – or a long-term sculpture that you build on to each time you visit your solo spot.
- Use a stick, pointy rock, or your finger to draw in the dirt or sand. You can tell a story, draw shapes or patterns you notice around you, or just “doodle.”
- What colors do you notice in your solo spot? Find three colors that really catch your eye. Describe them, sketch them, and/or give them a made-up name.
- What textures do you notice in your solo spot? Find three textures that really catch your eye. Describe them, sketch them, and/or give them a made-up name.
- Building! Can you stack small rocks in your solo spot? Can you create a cool structure with twigs? Perhaps build a tiny replica of a bird nest?
- Sound mapping is a great activity to build into solo spots, or can be done on its own. https://www.akcoastalstudies.org/data/Curriculum-2020_out_of_school/Sound_Mapping.pdf
- Nature napping. Lay down, get comfortable, and relax. Take a nap, or just enjoy being in nature.

Note: If you are learning at home, we'd love to learn more about your solo spot! Feel free to e-mail a picture of your spot or share notes and observations with us at info@akcoastalstudies.org or post them to the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies Facebook page.

Tips for leading effective solo spot activities in groups:

- Use a quiet and calm, but enthusiastic tone as you describe the activity.
- Clearly explain how students should select their spot. I've found it useful to require them to choose a spot that is **safe, comfortable, and where they can quietly focus**. You will also want to

set boundaries for how far they can go in selecting their spot and provide a specific amount of time (usually about 1-2 minutes) for them to find a good spot.

- From time to time, you may need to check in with individual learners to make sure they are doing okay. Otherwise, it is great to model your own solo spot.
- Provide an opportunity for students to share what they observed or experienced, and tie this into your learning objectives (observation skills, scientific process, ecosystem comparisons, seasonal change, nocturnal vs. diurnal, ecological relationships, and communication are all themes that are easily connected to solo spots).