

Title of Session: Nuts About Nature - Falling Into Autumn

Moderator: Bill Hilton Jr.

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Room: Tree House Conference Room

BJ: Welcome, everyone, to this month's Nuts About Nature discussion

BJ: we usually start all the discussions with introductions

BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In

DawnO: I'm a pre-service elementary teacher in Houston Tx

HaroldJ joined the room.

SarathS: I am a education administrator from Sri Lanka, presently in USA

RobinK: I am a older student returning to school after 16 years to get my teacher's certificate for high school science

MaryVR joined the room.

BJ: Hi, Harold. We're just doing introductions

BJ waves to Mary. We're just doing introductions

HaroldJ: I am currently at U of H , a preservice student.

MaryVR: Hi I'm a preservice teacher at UH

BillHi: U of H?

DawnO: Hi fellow Coogars

MaryVR: University of Houston

BillHi: Gotcha.

RobinK: I guess a bunch of us are here I'm from U of H also

BillHi: Well, let's hear it for the Texas folks.

DawnO: Thank you, thank you

BillHi: Sarath, where are you right now exactly?

SarathS: I am doing a MSc in Ed

BillHi: Where?

SarathS: And enjoying autumn

SarathS: Salem Uni in WV

BillHi: Ah, I know it well. Spent many summers in West Virginia.

SarathS: Midst of nature

BillHi: Anyway, I'm Bill Hilton Jr., your fearless leader for tonight's discussion which deals with "Falling Into Autumn."

BillHi: I'm in York, South Carolina, and taught highschool/college biology for many years. Now I run Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History and "Operation RubyThroat: The Hummingbird Project."

DawnO: Nice to meet you, Bill

BillHi: Anyone ever heard of either?

DawnO: No

MaryVR: no

BillHi: Dawn, you're supposed to lie.

DawnO: Oops

SarathS: I am looking at the website

RobinK: sounds like a neat job but I have not heard of it either

BJ . o O (you're all in for a treat!)

BillHi: Sarath, quit looking at the Web site!

BJ . o O (Sarath is an overachiever)

MaryVR: I've heard of Piedmont

BillHi: The Piedmont is that region of the Carolinas between the coastal plain and the mountains.

BillHi: It actually stretches from southern New York to northern Alabama.

BillHi: "Piedmont" literally translated means "foot of the mountains," or "foothills."

BillHi: Anyway, I'm just southwest of Charlotte, NORTH Carolina but in SOUTH Carolina.

BillHi: Fair game for tonight's discussion is anything about nature and natural history. Anyone have a leaf-off question?

RobinK: Did the hurricane effect you or the place where you work

BillHi: I actually meant to say "leadoff," but it really came out better as "leaf-off"!

MaryVR: I'm going to teach high school history - what are good ways of mixing the two?

BillHi: The hurricane missed South Carolina completely and came ashore in NC. We got a little wind and not a drop of rain.

BillHi: Okay, let me respond to Mary's question.

BillHi: Mary, U.S. history?

MaryVR: I haven't defined it but probably - possibly world history

BillHi: Well, that makes it harder to answer.

MaryVR: I would be happy to hear about either

BillHi: Well, for the sake of discussion, let's concentrate on U.S. History and natural history.

MaryVR: Sounds like a plan

BillHi: As you know, there's some big news in the U.S. lately about a couple of guys named Lewis and Clark. How would you folks describe them?

BillHi: Anyone?

MaryVR: one was a cartographer, right?

BillHi: Okay. keep going.

DawnO: All I know about Lewis and Clark is that they traveled across the country with and Native American woman

SarathS: explorers

BillHi: Sakajaweha (sp.).

DawnO: thanks

RobinK: Great explorers that opened up the west for further expansion after reporting what they found

BillHi: Anything else?

SarathS: naturalists?

RobinK: Found the head waters of the Mississippi or was it the Missouri River

DawnO: didn't they canoe the Grand Canyon?

HaroldJ: Meteorologists?

BillHi: Lewis and Clark went up the Missouri River looking for the Northwest Passage 200 year ago. They finally got to the Pacific Ocean, but there was no navigable route for ships.

BillHi: Along the way, they kept extensive diaries. Guess what about?

MaryVR: what they saw

BillHi: Be specific.

MaryVR: new plants, animals, etc

BillHi: Okay.

RobinK: what were new discoveries for them whether that was plants, animals

BillHi: Also the weather, seasonal changes, etc.

BillHi: They went through the Dakotas and into Idaho. Got any guesses as to whether they saw Grizzly Bears there?

RobinK: did they go thru Yellowstone?

MaryVR: Robin, I don't know specifics, but it seemed a safe assumption

DawnO: what would be different about what they saw regarding seasons as opposed to what they already knew

RobinK: Lot more snow, different varieties of trees like aspens

BillHi: Back to Grizzly Bears first.

DawnO: okay sorry

MaryVR: well when the river swells and dries out would certainly have affected them

MaryVR: oops

RobinK: I'm sure they did see them, their range would have been larger then

DawnO: I would assume they saw them

BillHi: Okay, Robin's going in the right direction. There are no Grizzly Bears in South Dakota today, so when biologists want to figure out when that's always been the case, they consult HISTORICAL records, such as those compiled by Lewis and Clark--who DID see grizzlies in

BillHi: the Dakotas and said so in their journals.

RobinK: The same would be with plants that are no longer in areas also.. right?

BillHi: Exactly, so we can conclude that anyone who studies nature--even in a passing way--should document what he/she observes. You never know when it might be useful, as in trying to determine whether a species is doing well, going extinct, etc.

RobinK: Didn't they also make detailed maps that would show if the river flow has changed since then?

BillHi: Good thinking, Robin.

RobinK: I grew up in St Louis so Lewis & Clark were a big topic in school The arch and the National Expansion Museum under and all.....

BillHi: Yep, that's where they began their journey. So, Mary, have we given you a seminal thought on how to relate nature to the teaching of U.S. history?

MaryVR: yes, thank you all

BillHi: Okay, back to documenting everyday observations.

MaryVR: I love maps so that idea is especially helpful, Robin

BillHi: in the days of Lewis and Clark, they used parchment and quill pens.

BillHi: Today we have the luxury (or curse) of being able to use digital cameras and web sites.

RobinK: Autumn is a hard subject to talk about in the Houston area we don't have much of a change like other places in the country.

DawnO: I agree

MaryVR: hey - we go from green to brown in about two weeks

BillHi: One of the things I try to do at Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History is keep track of the day-to-day nature, even when the changes aren't so obvious.

DawnO: The only way the kids know it's fall is Halloween

MaryVR: you mean that's not a season

SarathS: This is the first time I am experiencing an Autumn, we don't have seasons in Sri Lanka

DawnO: So how would I go about having my fourth graders document and learn more about autumn here in Texas?

BillHi: Even though Houston isn't a four-season city, there are definite changes from January through December, and the same is true of Sri Lanka.

RobinK: Unless you are lucky enough to have a Chinese talloberry tree or some poison ivy in your yard that turn red.... but if you really watch things like the hummingbirds traveling back thru the area and if you are lucky you can see the Monarch migrate.

BillHi: Okay, Robin has two right there.

RobinK: and native vegetation changes as in what is currently in bloom

BillHi: How about differences between daytime and nighttime temperatures?

BillHi: And the angle of the sun through the year?

MaryVR: yes the discrepancy gets larger at this time of year

DawnO: great ideas. It is hard to teach lessons about such things to students that are not concrete. It seems like it could get complex very fast

RobinK: I think you would have to pick one view point and go from there and not try to cover everything

BillHi: The way to keep it from being complex is to narrow down what you're observing and make scientific measurements when you can.

MaryVR: migration patterns may be an idea - I know dove hunting is very big here, so they , at least, are on the move this time of year

DawnO: I like the idea of an "outdoor classroom", any ideas on what we could look for

DawnO: it will be hard to really track migration for 30 minutes every day but maybe vegetation changes?

RobinK: I know there are grants from the TX parks and wildlife that would allow you to plant a Wildscape in your school yard

BillHi: An "outdoor classroom" is whatever there is after you walk out of the door to your classroom.

MaryVR: what about gardening and harvest type activities

BillHi: If you're trying to attract hummingbirds or butterflies you can put a hanging basket in your window.

DawnO: that sounds just right

RobinK: You may be able to get the local garden club to help you

DawnO: I think also doing leaf tracings and colorings might be fun

BillHi: And master gardeners, and the Extension service.

DawnO: you have all given me some great ideas to take with me

RobinK: those retired people love to pass on their knowledge and love of plants

BillHi: Great. Shall we move on to some specifics?

MaryVR: if you're lucky enough to have an opening window, there are these bird feeders that can be put into windows so that the birds come right "in" the classroom

BillHi: Another good idea.

BillHi: I'd like to go back to my point about journals and digital cameras and Web sites. Everyone with me now?

DawnO: yes

RobinK: Actually most of us from Houston are taking a Technology in the Classroom class

MaryVR: indeed

HaroldJ: That's true.

SarathS: yes

BillHi: Students of any age (which includes adults) don't see the changing of the seasons because sometimes those changes are subtle. If you keep a nature journal, it FORCES you (in a very pleasant sort of way) to be a better observer.

RobinK: How often would you do it weekly?

BillHi: Slow down. :-). Kids can take notes about nature observations, but they're greatly enhanced by sketches and water colors

RobinK: not if they can't draw like me

BillHi: Many kids, however, believe that they can't draw, but any of them can use--and get very excited about--digital cameras.

RobinK: That would be true

MaryVR: you could possibly let them use their own yards - I just started my own on my yard and garden this year and it's not much work - mostly observation

DawnO: excellent point, this would be a great project and I know that most schools in Houston have digital cameras to check out from the library

BillHi: So, let's say you have several digital cameras--they're cheap these days--and you lend them out to kids who don't have one, and you ask them to document a natural place on a weekly basis.

RobinK: could be a group project if there is not that many camera's available

BillHi: My guess is that over 30-36 weeks of school those kids will notice a few changes.

RobinK: or team up kids who live in houses with those in apartments

MaryVR: yeah, or they could use a park

DawnO: we have several nature parks and arboretums here in the Houston area that are free of charge

BillHi: Yes, there are variations on the theme, but let's stick with the core idea.

RobinK: what would they do with the pictures after they have them?

BillHi: The "natural area: could be a backyard or a park or even a grassy median near a bus stop.

BillHi: Ideally, however, it is their own backyard or some other locale in which they feel a sense of "ownership."

MaryVR: they could print them and put them in journals - or if you're a bit more hi-tech you could have a class website or something

MaryVR: to that effect

BillHi: Okay, Mary, you're forcing me to make you look at my Web site. :-0

SarathS: put them into a time frame

BillHi: Everybody look at <http://www.hiltonpond.org>

SarathS: to observe changes

RobinK: would you tell them to take the same picture over and over so they can see the differences.. say a bush or tree

BillHi: Don't go past the Home Page, please.

BillHi: Is everyone at <http://www.hiltonpond.org> ?

SarathS: yes

MaryVR: yes

DawnO: yes

BillHi: Robin?

JeffC nods

BillHi: Okay, first off EVERYbody has to bookmark this page.

SarathS -)

DawnO: done

BillHi: Thank you.

DawnO: np

RobinK: sorry I was a little slow... I am going to add it to my favorite lists

HaroldJ: Done

BillHi: If you scroll down a bit on the page, you'll see a little banner for "This Week at Hilton Pond."

RobinK: I saw that

JeffC: I'll put it in my online bookmarks at <http://www.mybookmarks.com/public/coops> in the Science folder

RobinK: talking about water bugs

BillHi: Under that is a link for the week of 1-7 October, so click on the word "Whirligigs".

BillHi: That will take you to <http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek031001.html>

BillHi: Not bugs, Robin, "beetles.!"

BillHi: Anyway, everybody read the first paragraph.

RobinK: What a great place to work!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

BillHi: And live.

BillHi: The first paragraph deals with a bunch of the stuff we've just talked about. Care to interpret it for the group?

BillHi: "deals"

DawnO: I like how it was casual at first but you came prepared and found something unexpected

RobinK: You were observing changes in your normal view

SarathS: ready to record

BillHi: Excellent, Dawn & Robin.

DawnO: even experts get surprised sometimes

BillHi: Dawn and Robin.

RobinK: I bet it is an ever changing picture window you have

BillHi: Yes, the window doesn't change position, but what I see through it does change.

BillHi: Just like things would change over time through the lens of a digital camera.

RobinK: and with the Web and digital camera's you are able to share with those of us who do not have this "view"

BillHi: Which is what we would ask the students to do, also.

DawnO: they would LOVE that

BillHi: To my knowledge, there is nothing like "This Week at Hilton Pond" on the Web and, as you can see, I am now at installment #192.

HaroldJ: Nice detailed photos!! a good job.

BillHi: Kids could do something similar as a Weblog, complete with digital photos.

RobinK: Over the school year the subjects you were teaching would change how would you incorporate it in the whole school year

SarathS: A pond would be a pretty complex eco system

RobinK: or would it be an ongoing project?

BillHi: There's nothing wrong with having a constant theme. You would find ways to relate whatever curriculum goal to the journal.

BillHi: Again, you can reduce the complexity by concentrating on certain subsets.

BillHi: Such as trees, insects, birds, etc.

RobinK: Enclosing the digital photos with the journal would make it more interesting for those kids who hate doing journals

BillHi: Exactly

MaryVR: It would also be more flexible for those who want to use regular film and camera (even though it takes away from the digital aspect)

BillHi: Okay, our times about up. If you want a free on-line subscription to "This week at Hilton pond" send an e-mail to <mailto:thisweek@hiltonpond.org> with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

MaryVR: Thanks, have a nice evening!

BillHi: it's non-fattening and guaranteed to please.

DawnO: thanks, this was very nice

BillHi: Thanks to BJ for moderating.

HaroldJ: Thanks a lot for an informative evening.

RobinK: I had fun and learned a lot also.... I can't wait till I can teach

SarathS: thank you

BJ: Thanks, Bill

BillHi: Ya'll come back next month.

BJ: the next Nuts about Nature discussion is November 11

RobinK: I'll be there