

Title of Session: Nuts About Nature - It's September Already!

Moderator: Bill Hilton Jr.

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BJ: Welcome to this month's Nuts About Nature. The topic is It's September Already. Have You Been To The Woods With Your Students Yet?

BJ: As always, please introduce yourself and tell us where you are and what you do/teach so Bill knows who's here.

BillHi: Bill's waiting

KristenFS: hi my name is Kristen and I am a preservice teacher at the university of Houston getting my degree to teach grades 4-8 science

ElizabetS2: Hi! I'm Liz. I work as I research scientist and I am currently getting my teacher's certification for high school science from the University of Houston.

LisaSan: Hi. My name is Lisa and I am working in getting my teaching certificate and masters at the same time. I want to teach high school biology. I am currently a sub. I am a bad typer.

BillHi: It's KO. Where all baid typers heqar.

BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania. I am always looking for ways to integrate the arts into science

BJ chuckles

BillHi: Well, I'm Bill Hilton jr.

LisaSan: Thanks Bill. I feel better.

BillHi: I taught high school and college biology for about 20 years.

BillHi: Now I'm executive director of Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History in York SC.

BillHi: I incorporated our family property as a nonprofit nature center.

BillHi: So I get to live where I work.

KristenFS: that's pretty cool

LisaSan: Where is York? Coastal?

BillHi: York, as the name of the center indicates, is smack in the middle of the South Carolina piedmont Physiographic Province.

BillHi: The Piedmont is the region between the Coastal plain and the Mountains.

BillHi: It's marked by rolling hills, lots of tributaries and--what most people think about when they hear "Piedmont"--red clay.

LisaSan: Silly me we have the piedmont here in VA too. Duh. I saw Hilton and thought HHI.

BillHi: The piedmont actually stretches from Long Island NY to central Alabama.

BillHi: And it definitely goes through Virginia.

BillHi: How would each of you describe the regions in which you currently live?

LisaSan: Yes, my kids bring in that red clay you mentioned on their clothes.

ElizabetS2: the gulf coast- hot, humid, and sticky!

BillHi: Topographically?

KristenFS: hot hot hot and more hot

KristenFS: maybe a cool front every now and then (85 degrees that is)

BillHi: I understand that part. (-:

ElizabethS2: fairly flat near the coast, but you don't have to go to far in Texas to hit some hills or the desert

BillHi: There's obviously more to your region than temperature and humidity.

LisaSan: Northern Virginia, just east of the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. A few rolling hills, lots of streams and that red clay. Too much development too.

KristenFS: very flat--gets hilly a little up north (Austin area)

BillHi: Lisa, you didn't actually say what city you're in.

LisaSan: Bealeton, just north of Fredericksburg.

BillHi: I was just in Fredericksburg last month giving public hummingbird programs.

LisaSan: I found the Dallas area to be very flat (and hot and humid) when we lived there. I missed the seasons.

BillHi: Okay, now we're getting somewhere. You've mentioned topography, climate, and seasonality.

LisaSan: Sorry I missed the programs. Was it through Mary Washington?

BillHi: No, through Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History and the Wild Bird Center.

BillHi: Is there anything else that is PARTICULARLY distinctive (from a scientific perspective) about the region in which you now live?

BJ: shale and lots of rocks

LisaSan: The change of the seasons was the best thing about moving to VA. I grew up with very distinct seasons and really missed them when we lived in the desert and in TX

ElizabethS2: hmmm, I am trying to think of some distinct wildlife for the Houston area, but I am drawing a blank right now- lots of squirrels

KristenFS: mosquitoes!!!!

BillHi: Houston is pretty well developed, but I'll bet there's something.

ElizabethS2: ah, that's a good one Kristen!

KristenFS: big ones

BillHi: Yeah, but mosquitoes could be New Orleans or Alaska, too.

BJ: brown bats to eat the mosquitoes

KristenFS: distinctive compared to what??

LisaSan: We live near rivers that are part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and recently snakehead fish were found in the Potomac.

BillHi: Maybe I should have said "unique."

KristenFS: I can't think of anything nature like that Houston has that is unique--maybe the wetlands run through it

KristenFS: I know they have disappeared over many years

KristenFS: but they use to cover Houston

KristenFS: is that something unique you may be looking for?

LisaSan: And think of all the natural filtration that was lost with their destruction.

SusanR . o O (the Loon is unique to Ontario)

BillHi: It wasn't my intention, but I think we've just come up with a very good first-day question for students in a science class: "Describe your local habitat and tell one thing about it that is unique."

LisaSan: Yes but we as teachers have to know the answer

LisaSan: Ha!

BillHi: Well, then, get to work!

BJ smirks...did I mention that Bill is tough?

BillHi: Maybe if you were a new teacher in an unfamiliar region you could learn something from the students on Day Two when they brought in their answers.

KristenFS: that's true

ElizabetS2: good point

BillHi: So what's the BEST way to find out what the local habitat is like?

BillHi: Habitat.

LisaSan: Field trip

KristenFS: go outside and explore it

SusanR: go outside and take a walk

ElizabetS2: actually take the time to look around you!

SusanR: go outside and take a walk

LisaSan: It wouldn't have to be the entire area it could just be the habitat around the playground

BillHi: You're all right, of course. (I'm glad none of you said to look it up on Google.)

KristenFS: ha

BillHi: So when would you say the typical teacher takes the first field trip of the school year?

LisaSan: October Pumpkin Patch. All of my kids, every year.

SusanR: October

LisaSan: Some patches do more with seed and plant cycle, animal tracks etc.

KristenFS: I'm not a teacher yet--I honestly don't know

ElizabetS2: here- fall would probably be better versus the summer

BillHi: October's a little late. You've already missed all the late summer wildflowers.

BillHi: The typical teacher actually takes the first trip in the spring--which is 'WAY too late.

BillHi: And lots of teachers actually wait until May--after testing is over.

LisaSan: I agree. A field trip can really reinforce the class room lessons, if the trip is carefully planned.

BillHi: So here's my seminal question: If you could take field trips with your students, what would the optimum number of trips and timing of those trips be?

KristenFS: maybe 4 a year--one during each season to see the changes in nature?

LisaSan: Ideally? No budget restrictions? Once a month. I would love to visit the same site over and over and track the changes as the seasons change.

ElizabetS2: well optimally, it would probably be an infinite number of trips- every time of the day, morning, noon, night and seasons are all different; they all have something unique about them

BillHi: Oh, Kristen . . .Lisa . . . Liz . . . you all do my heart good!

RuthMM joined the room.

BJ smiles

BillHi: Obviously there will be restrictions, but wouldn't once a month be a good compromise?

LisaSan: There would be so many different things to do that the trip wouldn't become to routine. There could be water testing, plant counts animal observation as well as tracking seasonal change.

BillHi: Well, the seasonal change concept is a good rationale for a once-a-month trip, even if you observed nothing else.

KristenFS: I guess it depends on where you go on how many times you could do it

BillHi: One school where I taught was adjacent to a golf course that was fairly rustic. We took a trip there on the same day every month.

BillHi: Guess what were the two most important observations students made, over the school year?

LisaSan: That's what I intend to do, even if it only to a nearby field with a stream in it. A wooded area would be great too.

LisaSan: Uh, number of balls in the pond?

BillHi: From the science point of view.

BJ: shadows?

KristenFS: I don't know

ElizabethS2: um, I'm stumped too

KristenFS: the trees changing??

LisaSan: thinking

KristenFS: I give up

BillHi: Pretty simple, but an important concept: 1. In nature, everything changes. 2. Some things change a lot more than others.

LisaSan: Of course...

BillHi: The biggest changes, as suggested, were the deciduous trees and migratory birds.

BillHi: But the students also became aware of much less obvious changes.

LisaSan: such as?

BJ: length of shadows is a cool thing to track if you go there at the same time of day each time

BillHi: At least, they were less obvious until one starts looking. (-:

LisaSan: that would be fun! Especially with the younger set

BillHi: For example, the golf course water hazards had green water in the fall and spring, but clear water in the winter.

LisaSan: too cold for algae?

BillHi: Can you explain this?

BillHi: Whoops. Lisa already has it.

BJ: . o O (this is a smart group, Bill!)

KristenFS: oh ok

BillHi: So if you were going to do a microscope lesson on algae, now you know when to plan it.

LisaSan: why wasn't that on my Praxis II?

BillHi: I have one other question that's pretty important right now.

LisaSan: Did you have any trouble gaining permission (school and golf course) to go monthly?

BillHi: When should you take the first field trip of the year?

BillHi: It related to the curriculum.

BillHi: When should you take the first field trip of the year?

KristenFS: September

LisaSan: September. Start the year off with some actual experience not just lecture. It might not all tie in in the beginning but will eventually make sense for everyone.

SusanR: first day of school

ElizabetS2: on the first or second day, start early

TanaM: yeah I say first day as well

BillHi: Day one might be tough, what with textbooks, schedule changes, etc.

KristenFS: I think September before it gets too cool out so changes can be seen'

BillHi: But you could TALK about taking the trip and then actually go outside sometime during the first week.

LisaSan: Maybe the Friday of the first week? Everyone could use a change of scenery then.

TanaM: I think it depends on the grade level

BillHi: Why, Tana?

TanaM: well for kindergarten I would want to get them acquainted with the school the first day so that they don't get lost

LisaSan: My kids all said that their bottoms hurt from sitting all day (K, 2, 4) during that first week back

LisaSan: Showing the kids that school can be fun and exciting is important and what science is an exciting topic.

BillHi: Good responses.

BillHi: Well, this is my first "Nuts About Nature" of the school year, so I would be remiss unless I took you out on a field trip.

BillHi: Are you ready to go?

LisaSan: Great

SusanR: . o O (get the kids out and let them explore..even if it is only in the school yard)

ElizabetS2: sounds like fun

SusanR: Ready

BillHi: Okay. We're going to Hilton Pond. Click on

<http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek040801.html> and wait for me at the top of the page.

BillHi: Everybody got it?

KristenFS: got it

RuthMM: think so

ElizabetS2: finally

BillHi: Every week I publish to my Web site an original photo essay about something happening at Hilton Pond.

BillHi: This is the one from the first week in August.

BillHi: First of all, there's a note about that hummingbird program in Virginia, but ignore it for now.

BillHi: Scroll down to the first photo.

BillHi: This particular essay is about Swamp Milkweed. Can you see any science lessons in this photo? 9-:

BillHi: (-:

BillHi: Keep scrolling to the next photo.

BillHi: More science.

BillHi: And the bottom photo.

BillHi: I spend a whole photo essay just talking about Swamp Milkweed and its pollinators.

LisaSan: Beautiful!

KristenFS: wow

RuthMM: WOW!

BillHi: You can do the same with one flower or one tree or one shrub right on your school grounds.

SarahSa joined the room.

BillHi: But you HAVE to go outside first.

BillHi: And I suggest you do it during week One, and every month thereafter.

BillHi: So times a wasting. it's September already.

BillHi: Any questions?

BJ applauds wildly! Thanks, Bill.

SusanR: Good suggestions, Bill

RuthMM: no, thank you for your information.

KristenFS: thank you

ElizabetS2: no, what wonderful ideas! thank you

LisaSan: None for me. I want to explore your site

RuthMM: wonderful ideas!

BJ: you can subscribe to Bill's newsletter...it's terrific

LisaSan: Thank you!

TanaM: cool, thanks

BillHi: Please bookmark <http://www.hiltonpond.org>

LisaSan: Done!

ElizabetS2: I already did!

SarahSa: Yes - the newsletter is excellent

BillHi: And on rainy days, you can take virtual field trips to Hilton Pond.

BJ: and join us next month for another installment of NUTS ABOUT NATURE!

RuthMM left the room.

KristenFS: thank you

BillHi: Thanks, all for you thoughts!

ElizabetS2: thank you, this has made the wheels in my head start turning

BillHi: Great. that's my goal.

BJ: Bill is very good at that, Elizabeth

LisaSan: See you next month

BillHi: You bet. And in Fredericksburg next year.

LisaSan: I am going to check out that Hummingbird program.

BillHi: Lisa . . . <http://www.hiltonpond.org/HummingbirdMornings04Main.html>

SusanR: Thanks Bill, You have stimulated my interest in outdoor science

BillHi: Break out those snowshoes and go to it.

LisaSan: What is really funny is that I am currently taking a Tech in the Classroom course.

BJ: tech in the classroom also includes using tech for professional development, Lisa

BJ . o O (or it should)

BJ: somehow we forget about the teachers when we push tech in the classroom

BillHi: Well, let me go batten down the hatches just in case Ivan swings this way. we're expecting some rain. at least.

LisaSan: That's why I have joined Tapped In, as part of my course requirements. Glad that I had to do it. I had no idea this was here. Thanks again, bye.

BillHi: Bye, Lisa. thanks for your input.