

# landed

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO OUTDOOR LEARNING: TEACHER'S GUIDE



little bluestem  
landscape architecture

*Little studio, deep roots.*

CREATED 2020  
Little Bluestem Landscape Architecture  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
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# ABOUT landED

As landscape architects, we are responsible for the design of beautiful, livable outdoor spaces. At Little Bluestem Landscape Architecture (LBLA) this responsibility often translates to working with community groups in education, healthcare, and daycares. But we feel that there is potential beyond the construction of landscape designs for programming that establishes a key connection with nature. This belief led to the development of landED, a program through which we reveal the intricacies of landscape systems, and guide our communities to engage with outdoor space to its full potential. We have worked closely with the Manitoba Curriculum and local educators to ensure all our lesson plans and workshops can fit within the framework laid out by our province.

A source of inspiration for our team has come from the Landscape Architecture Foundation's *21<sup>st</sup> Century Call to Action*. This declaration critically examines the power of landscape architecture to respond to the global experience of climate change, urbanization, management of vital resources like water, and global inequities. Through our work, we join a passionate community working to answer the call to action at this critical time when the talents and services of landscape architects are so vitally needed.

We believe outdoor education is critical, especially in youth. So in 2019 we established landED: a landscape enrichment program by LBLA. landED is committed to helping communities engage with their environment. We offer land-based design and environmental learning through lesson packages, placemaking toolkits, and interactive outdoor workshops. Our focus on nature programming extends to all seasons of the year, adapting to the drastic landscape changes we experience in our northern climate.

landED programming takes into consideration the different scales of landscape availability, from hardtop schoolyards, to forest and field exploration. Our programming offers safe and inclusive lesson plans and activities that promote risky play through nature-based exploration. No matter the outdoor space, age, or skill level, landED offers programming that works to meet your needs. LBLA's design clients also have access to content specifically tailored towards activating the landscape spaces designed by our firm. With our knowledge and passion for landscape architecture and the design of ecological systems, our team is excited and ready to help you enliven and connect with your outdoor spaces.

**LANDSCAPE + EDUCATION = landED**

## INDIGENOUS ALLYSHIP AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We at LBLA acknowledge that the Indigenous people of Manitoba and North America have been providing land-based education to their children for centuries. We recognize that due to the history of colonialism and residential schools, the tradition of land-based teaching has been systematically disrupted. As signatories of Winnipeg's Indigenous Accord, we are committed to acknowledging the history and impacts of colonization, while consulting and engaging with Indigenous Peoples to address the need for ongoing land reconciliation. We believe in the importance of incorporating Indigenous pedagogy into educational practices, and cultivating places that are reflective of Indigenous worldviews. At landED we are dedicated to creating programming for individuals to engage in design-focused educational practices that reflect a spirit and intent of reconciliation, while advocating for landscapes that acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous teachings and practices.

We are a small business on Treaty One territory in Winnipeg, Manitoba, filled with passionate, professional nature-lovers who are very committed to improving the environment. In order to support our local business so we can keep doing the work we love, please pay and download content for your own classroom use only. Honour system in full effect!

We would love for you to share updates using the hashtag #landEDMB, so we can be a part of your journey to integrate landED in your classroom. Your reviews and feedback help us grow, so please reach out to us on any of our social media platforms:



@littlebluestemla



@landEDMB



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[littlebluestemla.com/landED](http://littlebluestemla.com/landED)

*Thank you for your support!*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Acknowledging the Land

- 5 INTRODUCTION
- 5 SIGNIFICANCE TO EDUCATION

## Outdoor Classroom Management

- 6 MAKING THE OUTDOORS AS COMFORTABLE AS YOUR CLASSROOM
- 6 AGREEMENTS, NOT RULES
- 7 BOUNDARIES FOR LEARNING OUTDOORS
- 7 RESPECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

## Practical Measures

- 8 PREPARING FOR CONDITIONS
- 9 PREPARING FOR CHANGE
- 10 BUILDING AN OUTDOOR KIT

## Know Before You Go

- 11 WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT
- 11 PLANNING FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING
- 12 100 METRE FIELD TRIP
- 12 FIELDS NOT ESSENTIAL

## Conclusion

- 13 LAND AS A TEACHER
- 14 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## WELCOME TO OUTDOOR LEARNING!

Hello! We are so thrilled that you are interested in taking your classroom outdoors. COVID-19 or not, there are far-reaching benefits to outdoor education, including:

- enhanced personal and social communication skills
- increased physical health and physical literacy
- enhanced mental and spiritual health
- enhanced spiritual, sensory, and aesthetic awareness
- the ability to assert personal control and increased sensitivity to one's well-being
- socio-economic benefits into adulthood

This guide was created as a resource to help plan and establish confidence in facilitating outdoor learning and activities. We've included directions for planning outdoor learning year-round, as well as tips and tricks for successful outdoor classroom management.



### DON'T PANIC

This is your first step in the transition to outdoor learning. We are here to support you!



# ACKNOWLEDGING THE LAND

## INTRODUCTION

As inhabitants of Turtle Island, at Little Bluestem Landscape Architecture + Design & landED we believe that it is incredibly important to take time to acknowledge the land we play, work, and reside on, and the space we share with Indigenous peoples. The health of the planet and people are interdependent, and action is required to ensure stewardship for future generations. (Check out the 7th Generation Principle, at <http://7genfoundation.org/7th-generation/>)

## SIGNIFICANCE TO EDUCATION

Before taking your class outdoors, start a discussion about land acknowledgements. You can brainstorm as a class how a land acknowledging statement shows respect for others, and how it can be a useful tool to help us understand our own place in the world. Encourage your students to further engage with land acknowledgements by writing their own. We would strongly encourage you to approach a community Elder, understanding that land acknowledgements are first and foremost a declaration of respect. Students can inquire as to the best definition of these acknowledgements, why we make them, what treaty we

reside on, and the groups that lived and continue to live in the places we call home. Have students reflect on the ways they interact with the land and the spaces they share with Indigenous people around them each day.



## PROMPTING DISCOVERY QUESTIONS CAN INCLUDE:

- Can you identify universal values and beliefs about the history of this land?
- What is the history of the land your school is built on?
- Do the names of the places and streets you commonly pass have a history?
- How do traditional teachings link plants, animals, water, and minerals together?

By completing this research and discussion exercise, and encouraging your students to engage with history before going outside, you will help your students develop a deeper understanding of the significance of our land. Any time you travel outdoors or use outdoor materials, remind your students to thank and acknowledge the land for all it offers to us.

# OUTDOOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

## MAKING THE OUTDOORS AS COMFORTABLE AS YOUR INDOOR CLASSROOM

The key to a smooth transition when moving outside with students is to imagine the outdoors as an extension of your regular classroom space. Doing so redefines the outdoors from being only a place of play, to an environment with the opportunity for learning. From the beginning of the school year, use language that works to support this mentality.



### TRY REFERRING TO YOUR OUTDOOR TEACHING AREA AS YOUR:

- outdoor classroom
- living laboratory
- garden lab

In addition, it is important to give students unprogrammed time to explore and learn in their own space when doing outdoor learning activities, so do not be afraid to allow time for this. Creating a comfortable environment for yourself and students to be at ease is the best way to establish the outdoors as a fitting addition to your learning environment.

## AGREEMENTS, NOT RULES

At the start of the school year, work together with your class to create a list of “outdoor education agreements”.

These agreements will act as the guidelines and expectations for behaviour when learning outside. “Behaviour” in this case, refers to respect for each other, teachers, and the environment. By phrasing expectations as agreements and not rules, you will help students understand that they are in control of their own behaviour.

Respectful behaviour ensures that outdoor learning can continue, and developing these behavioural guidelines in collaboration with the students helps with later negotiations, i.e. “Are you treating the environment in the way that we agreed upon?”.

Be clear with the students that to continue having the opportunity to learn outdoors, they must abide by the agreements that they created. Practice these skills and behaviours indoors so students know what is expected of them. By documenting the agreement and posting it in your indoor classroom to review before heading outside should help these behaviours to become second nature as classroom etiquette extends outdoors.





# OUTDOOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

## BOUNDARIES FOR LEARNING OUTDOORS

By consciously establishing boundaries with your students, you can create a safe and successful outdoor learning experience. Prior to going outside, explain the potential hazards and risks to your students, as well as how they can respect themselves, each other, and the land.



### PREVENTING ACCIDENTS

Hazards typically arise when students do not understand risk management, or are disrespectful of the reality of outdoor risks.

To help with risk management, it is important to establish a consistent recall practice when outdoors. Some teachers choose to use a whistle to bring students back in; others use methods such as howling (i.e. teacher howls, students howl in response, and return to the group to learn new information or begin a new activity). When establishing your class' recall system, it is important to start small, and slowly build upon that distance-trust with your students. As you build on this foundation of trust in an outdoor setting, and practice your recall system, you will be able to identify the students who you need to keep a close eye on.

## RESPECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

It is important to remind students that as outdoor learners, it is our responsibility to care for and respect the environment. Not only do we share these spaces with other humans, but also with plants, animals, and insects, and their habitats deserve our respect.

This respect should be outlined in your education agreements, and discuss the "leave no trace" recommendation, and mindful exploration (e.g. carefully lifting rocks, not ripping leaves or branches off of trees).





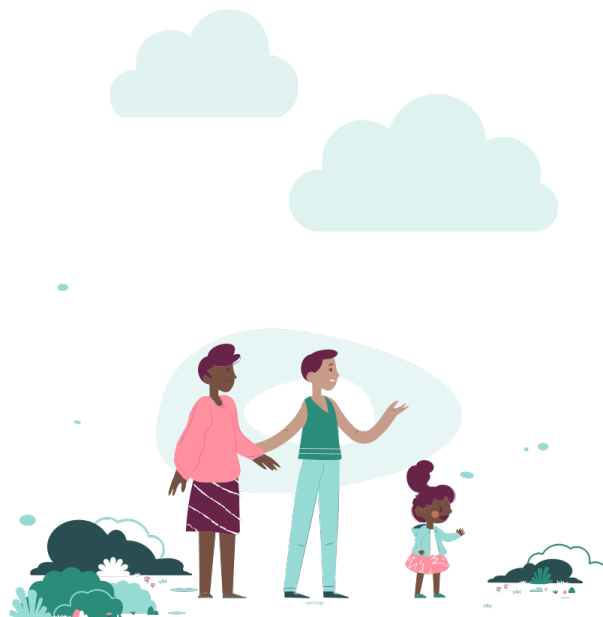
# PRACTICAL MEASURES

START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

## PREPARING FOR CONDITIONS

Work with your students' families from the beginning of the year. As students are expected to bring necessary supplies to learn; create a material list for students of tools required to go outdoors each day. This can be as simple as asking parents to send students to school with a hat, sunscreen, rain jacket, and towel to sit on each day. Try making a list for students to have an "outdoor grab bag", and consider how these requirements might change with the seasons. Establishing these expectations early on in the year will help contribute to an easy and fluid transition as classes move outside.

Before going outdoors with your class, review the outdoor conditions; you can choose a weather service provider and check online as a class, and then supplement the predictions with a "window check" where students can report what they see outside. Assessing the weather and the tools necessary before you go outdoors will help activate students' outdoor mindset before they get in the outdoor learning environment. Consider approaching the parent council to provide funding for outdoor supplies, or developing a fundraiser plan that will supplement students coming from a lower income background.



### A NOTE ABOUT RAIN

Establishing expectations early will help ease stresses about outdoor classroom space as weather conditions change. Help students understand that rain is just water, and they will soon dry off.

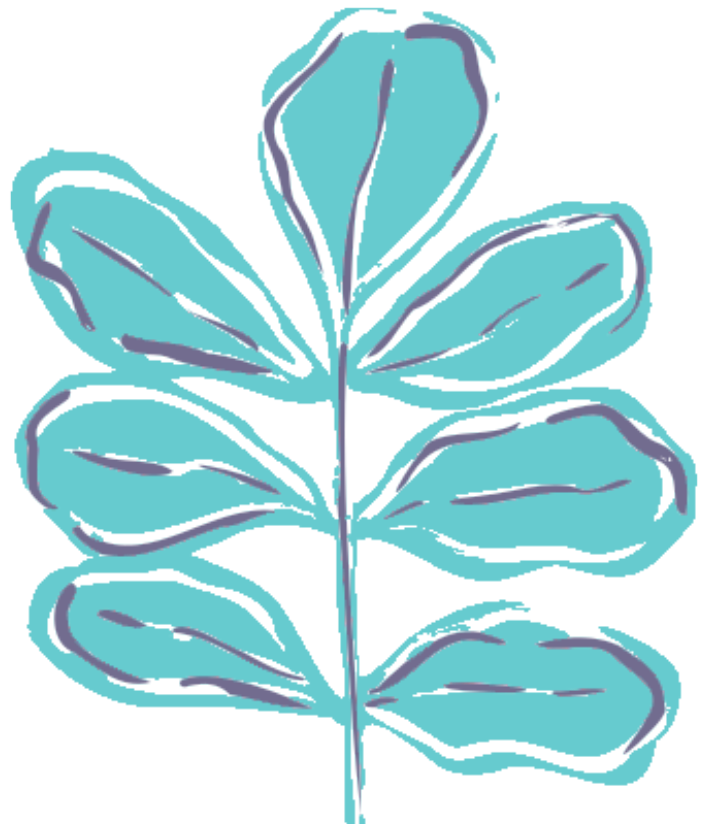
If you greet inclement weather as a learning opportunity, you will encourage your students to be excited about heading outdoors as the weather changes.

# PRACTICAL MEASURES

## PREPARING FOR CHANGE

Embarking on a journey of any kind can be hard. Navigating the change from a primarily indoor delivery model to outdoor education experience may induce stress for some administrators, parents and students. Every child has different needs, comfort levels and experience in the outdoors/inclement weather. It is reasonable to expect that some may experience anxiety about the changes that come with spending large amounts of time outside. Communication about expectations, clearly stating motivations and exploring concerns can be very helpful for this transition.

Offer students and their parents a safe outlet to voice their concerns about how spending time outside will affect physical and mental health, and consider developing a weekly risk-assessment series to answer questions and ease concerns. Work with students to develop an action plan to deal with each point of concern. If students are writing down their worries, have them indicate if they are comfortable having their concern shared anonymously during a class discussion. In each case, present ways to assess risk level, mitigate risk, and how to get/provide help if something bad does happen.



# PRACTICAL MEASURES

## BUILDING AN OUTDOOR KIT

By creating a small, tote-size outdoor kit for your class, you will always be ready to easily transition to outdoor learning spaces. Your kit does not have to be anything fancy, but simply a collection of items to help enhance your outdoor learning experience.

### CONSIDER INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR KIT:

- Attention-getter (as discussed in “Boundaries for Learning Outdoors” - this can be your voice, a musical instrument, a whistle, etc.)
- Mobile seating (acquire a tarp, or ask students to bring their own towel each day to sit on)
- Garbage bags for impromptu garbage collection as well as instant raincoats
- Writing tools
- Clipboards
- Ziplock bags
- Hula hoops (guides for physical distancing/personal space)
- Waterproof writing surface (blank paper or worksheet in a plastic ziplock. Alternatively, laminate worksheets for reuse)

By creating and following a kit list, you will have all the materials you need ready-to-go in an accessible bag or kit. You can also work with your students’ families to establish their own “outdoor grab bag”.

### REQUEST THAT STUDENTS BRING THE FOLLOWING SUPPLIES FROM HOME:

- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray
- Hand sanitizer
- Towel to sit on
- Pencil and/or dry erase marker

Working to build kits for each student with the help of your students’ families can help to frame the outdoors as an extension of your classroom (as they will also have an indoor school supply list), and make the transition outdoors more smooth.

### SIT-UPONS

Check out the Girl Guides’ online instructions for how to make [“Sit-Upons”](#) for your class!

# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Before taking your class outdoors, review your school division/school's updated policy on taking students outdoors. Encourage dialogue between your school's administration, educators, educational assistants, and custodial staff to create a learning environment that supports outdoor education. Through continued communication as a school community, you will be able to more easily plan how to best support your class and other outdoor learning ventures.

## PLANNING FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

Before taking your class outside, print/download a map of the area you intend to visit. Walk through the area by yourself, or with your other team members. As you walk, make notes on your map that account for potential learning opportunities, as well as potential hazards.

In the process of annotating your map, consider the curriculum connections that you plan to make, and study the area through that specific lens (e.g. How a science unit would make use of the outdoor space vs. how a math unit would). Make notes of ways you can connect the environment to that specific subject.

Return to your chosen outdoor space often to update these observations as the seasons change. If you are walking this space with a team, each person can adopt a different observational lens, and then compare possible connections.

As you map out areas that correspond to a specific subject area, consider how you could return to this space with your students, taking your class through this same exercise and asking them to view the outdoor space through specific subject area lenses.



### SHARING LESSONS

Consider how the strategies you are using to prepare for the year might themselves translate into lesson plans. Students can be involved in map annotation, behaviour guidelines, making outdoor material lists, etc.

# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

## 100 METRE FIELD TRIP

To have meaningful outdoor learning experiences you don't have to go far. Local exploration provides the opportunity for you to return often with your class, and build upon past experiences, working to further develop a sense of place with your class.

## FIELDS NOT ESSENTIAL

When planning for outdoor learning experiences, the space you take your students to does not need to be conventionally beautiful; tarmac and fences also create many opportunities for learning and activities. Don't be afraid to use these spaces.

Outdoor areas lacking in green space may lead to curriculum activities in which students imagine the future of their schoolyard, and are inspired to redesign their space.



# CONCLUSIONS

## LAND AS A TEACHER

Human wellbeing is deeply rooted in our connection to the land. Outdoor environments provide so many learning opportunities to us, and it is our job as educators to act as a bridge by creating connections for our students. By taking your students outdoors, you are not only creating a connection with the land, but fostering trust and relationships that support your students' well-being.

As schools' policies and practices change, one thing remains constant: the land and the lessons it offers us. So as you venture outside with your students this school year, take inspiration from the land and let it be your guide in a time of inquiry and outdoor education. Don't be scared to fail, because from failure emerges learning and new opportunities.



**"Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolmasters, and teach of us more than we can ever learn from books."**

- John Lubbock

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This introductory guide was developed by landED and Little Bluestem Landscape Architecture (LBLA).

Written by Rachel Cumpsty, Darcy Granove, Jane Hilder, and Krista Renwick.

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The logo for landED, featuring the word "land" in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font, followed by "ED" in a larger, bold, uppercase sans-serif font. A white line graphic resembling a roofline or a stylized 'E' is integrated into the top of the 'ED'.The logo for Little Bluestem Landscape Architecture. It features a stylized teal leaf graphic above the text "little bluestem" in a lowercase, teal, sans-serif font. Below this, the words "landscape architecture" are written in a smaller, teal, lowercase sans-serif font.

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