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## Tributary 1: A Contemplative Visit

Before you begin, we'd like to share some thoughts about practicing a contemplative activity: While many contemplative activities focus on one's inner experience, the practices we will ask you to complete at each stream visit, are designed to help you focus on the experience of *being with* a stream/river. To borrow words from a practice from the *Center for Imagination, Education and the Natural World* in North Carolina, we encourage you to focus on developing "relationship" and experiencing "resonance" at your special place.

Usually when we attempt to settle down and quiet our minds, especially the first time and often during subsequent sessions, they begin to chatter, sometimes wildly and loudly. Given this tendency of our minds, feel free to pay attention to the chatter, but don't get carried away by it. You may also, because of all you have learned, be tempted to interpret what you observe. Try not to interpret. Instead, try to stay with your direct sensory experiences. Sometimes quietly noting/acknowledging the chatter and interpretations that exist will allow you to refocus on directly experiencing what is before you. Don't be alarmed if you have to repeat the noting process over and over. Chatter and thought production are simply processes our minds engage in. They are what our minds do.

In addition to spending time in contemplation, we will ask you to *Reflect*. This may seem like we are asking you to do the same practice twice. We are not. Here is how the two differ. When we ask you to contemplate, we ask that you *directly* experience with your senses what is going on around you. As we have already mentioned, please turn off the part of your brain that wants to interpret, categorize, name, organize etc. Using the prompts given and your senses, just *notice* what is happening around you and if you wish, inside you too. What we refer to as *Reflect* is a practice whereby you'll weave

together the contemplative experience with knowledge acquired from the section in which you are working. Reflection therefore, is time to process and integrate different ways of knowing. Most of the time, you'll do this by writing.

## **Local Streams**

Most people live within a 5 minute walk of a stream. The stream or river you choose to work on with your students doesn't have to be large. It can be a small first order stream, a drainage ditch, or even a stormwater retention area. The idea is to locate a stream close enough to school that you can walk your students there and back within one class period. This way the investigation and assessment of the stream can be conducted as part of class rather than as a one off school trip. This eliminates the cost of transportation, enables students to conduct much more in depth research, and facilitates the production of meaningful student action projects. Of course, you can choose a stream that is further from the school and arrange to have students visit the stream as a class trip. Typically, a stream that is within 5 or 6 blocks of school should be close enough for you to conduct the research without the need to obtain transportation. School district rules will vary, however.

## **Stream Visit**

*Estimated time for this stream visit: 1 hour*

*What you'll need: Journal, regular and color pencils, something to sit on. Optional: non-toxic watercolors*

### **Contemplate: Sit Spot Visit 1**

Before you embark on this journey, be sure you are dressed appropriately for the weather. If it is cool, bring something to sit on. Once you have made these preparations, go find an enchanting and comfortable location at which to sit near a stream or river, a

place compelling enough that you will return to it over and over. It doesn't have to look like a tropical paradise. There might be trash or graffiti, there might be a road nearby. When you look, however, you will certainly find life. Pay attention to how you choose your site. What do you find appealing about the spot you have chosen?

Now become quiet and still, like a rock, or like a leaf sitting quietly and unobtrusively on the ground, and activate your senses of sight, hearing, touch, and smell. This settling in might take a while if you aren't used to stillness and silence.

- What do you immediately notice?
  - What takes longer to reveal its presence?
  - What is within your sightline?
  - What is close up? Farther away?
- 
- Next, consider sounds. What do you hear?
  - What sounds come from the stream?
  - What sounds come from the surrounding vegetation?
  - Listen attentively to the music of the stream or river and the surrounding floodplain.

Now that you are settled into this place, consider all the ways you used water in the past 24 hours. Jot them down. Next, begin to recall key moments with water in your life. Make a quick list of your memories. Some ideas to consider are: a Baptism; swimming in a pool; white water rafting, dancing in the spray of an open fire hydrant, sprinkler or water fountain; fishing; catching frogs or crayfish; canoeing, kayaking or paddle boarding; visiting the ocean, a lake, a harbor, a waterfall, a pond, or a wetland. Have you been caught in a rainstorm or a thunderstorm with a friend, parent, grandparent, auntie, sibling, etc? Leapt over or into puddles or small creeks?

Open your journal so you can work on two side-by-side blank pages. Please do not judge the quality of your work! It will be perfect. Fill the span of two pages with words and drawings to represent your water memories. This is your *Water Journey Map*. Include what happened, where, when, and with whom. Please also include the sounds, the sights, the smells, and emotions. Sometimes this activity provokes strong emotions, as people recall happy and sad water memories. If this happens, just let them pass through. When you are finished, please share your drawing with someone. Then, keep it nearby so you can recall how important water is in your life. Before you leave the stream site be sure to complete the “Reflect: What Do You Wonder?” section.

### **Using A Water Journey Map with Students**

If you decide to complete this activity with students, please keep in mind the following ideas: If you aren't outside listening to water, you can play “water” music for them, to help them get into the right frame of mind. Start the activity the same way you began it, by asking students to quickly recount all the ways they used clean water in the past 24 hours. You can even ask them “where did the water come from?” Then, give students large sheets of paper (we use heavyweight 11 x 17” paper) and colored pencils, pastels, etc., and invite them to fill the entire page. If you are short on time, you can ask them to focus on only one memory with water, and fill a 8.5 x 11” page. After students complete their water journey maps you might want to arrange all the water maps in a gallery type display so students can walk through and reflect upon what is on them. Set the guidelines about how students may comment (or not) on their classmates’ very personal work beforehand.

Water is not always a benign and life-giving presence in our lives. Sometimes it takes away. Please know your students in order to decide whether this is an appropriate activity or not. Please be prepared to provide extra support to students who may have experienced a traumatic water-related incident that you didn't know about. We have encountered this with an adult, and had a moving and ultimately positive conversation. We were able to conclude that one sad event involving water is also, part of life.

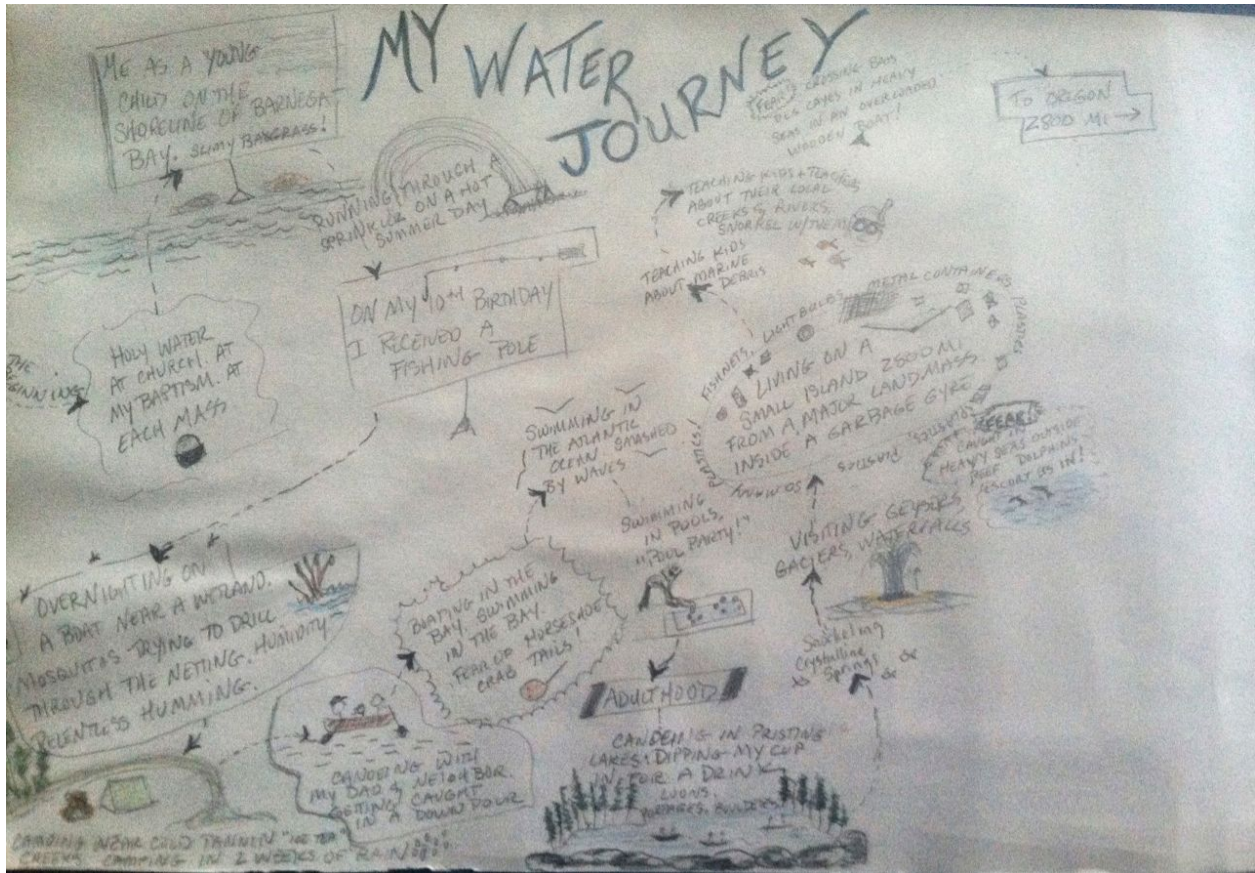


Figure 1. Adult Water Journey Map with leftover space for the future.



Figure 2. An adult Water Journey Map gallery set up outside.

## Reflect: What Do You Wonder?

After spending some quiet time at your stream, what are some things that caught your attention? What are some things that interested you or puzzled you? If you were to spend some more time studying this section of your stream (spoiler alert, you are!), what would you want to investigate?

Write down and save one or more questions to guide your future investigations.



## Interlude 1



Watching you look at each other while sailing into the clouds,

I wonder

what are you communicating

about the scene below.

The bay unfurling into infinity: today blue-brown, tomorrow a different

color.

Fish and other animals beneath the churning surface

that will also change

tomorrow.

People and our structures along the shore.

What do you sense and understand that I can't?

What would I do differently if I knew what you thought?

What would *we* do differently if we knew?

– *K. Chambliss*