

Exploring Urban Environments

GRADES K-2

Guiding Question

Where can we find nature in the city?

Connecting Concepts

- There are many different kinds of living things in any area, and they exist in different places on land and in water. (NGSS, LS4.D: Biodiversity and Humans)
- An urban forest is defined as all trees within a defined urban core boundary. (PLT FLF, 1.A.6)
- The size and scale of forest ownership can vary from a small patch of trees in a backyard or urban space to hundreds of thousands of acres (or hectares) in a national forest. (PLT FLF, 3.A.1)

Scope and Sequence

The collection and order of content below supports an intentional student learning progression.

Activity	Description
Backyard Safari	Students explore a nearby habitat—such as their backyard, schoolyard, or other outdoor setting—to look for signs of animals living there.
Adopt a Tree	Students select individual trees and observe them over time, developing a greater appreciation for trees and the things they provide.
Trees as Habitats	Students inventory the plants and animals—including humans—that live in, on, or around trees.
Discover Diversity (in Grades 3–5, see K–2 Variation)	Students take a 3-foot mini-hike, noting the plant and animals they encounter on the way.

See plt.org/academic-standards for detailed standards correlations for each activity.

Storyline

Students explore the nature that abounds in urban environments. They may be surprised to learn that many kinds of plants and animals live in cities, as well as in more natural settings.

- Begin with the activity Backyard Safari to introduce the concept that living things can be found in all kinds of outdoor environments. When they explore their backyard, schoolyard, or other outdoor setting, students will find a variety of animals or signs of animals living there.
- Next, invite students to observe a nearby tree over time using the activity Adopt a Tree. By investigating an individual tree, students will see that trees—and the organisms they support—are an important component of the urban environment.
- Lead students in the activity Trees as Habitats to focus on the plants and animals that live in and around the tree they “adopted.”
- End the unit with Discover Diversity’s Variation for K–2. Students share the highlights of a mini-hike on a lawn, in a crack in a sidewalk, or in another urban setting. Help students recall the variety of life they observed through this and other activities in this unit.