

Title of Session: Nuts About Nature-A Midsummer's NightMARE

Moderator: Bill Hilton Jr.

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Room: Tree House Conference Room

BJ: while we wait a few minutes for everyone to arrive...

BJ: please read the 10 steps above this chat window

BJ: o O (with the large groups, it's extra important to follow chat netiquette)

PatGst19: I teach Science to grades 5-8 in St. Louis

DoloresGst3: Hello, BJ, I have a group here today. We are in the Lab.

SuzannePT: I teach high school biology in Houston

BJ: great, Dolores

MaryPatGst2: I'm looking forward to learning a lot about this site to help with my teaching 4th grade science.

BJ: wonders if Bill is ready?

BillHi: Bill is. Intros?

BJ: Welcome to Nuts About Nature, everyone...

BJ: Bill presents Nuts about Nature each month in Tapped In

BrentL: I teach second and third grade in Oak Ridge, TN.

BJ: you're in for a real treat if you haven't participated in his discussions!

DanitaC: HS Lang Arts, Houston

BJ: anyone else want to give a brief intro?

ElizaL: I work for P.O.V. a doc series on PBS

MicheleAt: Hi I teach French and Spanish to high school kids

SheriG: I teach high school science at an alternative school in Gainesville, GA

TimW: I will be teaching first-grade-my first year of teaching!

HelenK: adult educ. British Columbia, Canada

DoloresGst3: I am the technology coordinator at St. Raphael's in St. Louis.

KimGst8: I teach Language arts 5-8

JeanMC: Now I train teachers to use ICT

LeeAM: I teach physical education in Atlanta

KimGst8: St. Louis

MarleneM: I am a middle school teacher/staff developer in Brooklyn

<http://www.is187.com>

MaryPatGst2: I teach with Pat and Kim in St. Louis.

BJ: hands the virtual floor over to our esteemed speaker

BillHi: Welcome, everyone. Sounds like a terrific and diverse group. I'm Bill Hilton Jr., executive director of Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History near York, South Carolina USA. As BJ said, I do a "Nuts About Nature" session every second Tuesday through Tapped In.

LynneW: I teach undergrad and graduate Ed Tech in the College of Education Concordia - Portland, OR

BillHi: What we try to do each month is encourage teachers (and prospective ones) to think more about using nature to excite kids about learning.

BillHi: Each month we pick a topic and explore a concept.

MaryPatGst2: Sounds great!

BillHi: For the Festival, the topic is "A Midsummer's NightMARE."

BillHi: So give me a moment to explain, and then we'll get forward with discussion.

BJ has been waiting for two months for this discussion!

BillHi: One of the main obstacles to learning about nature is the fear of the unknown. It's also one of the reasons many teachers won't take classes outdoors on field trips.

SuzannePT: Isn't the unknown what makes science fun?

PatGst19: Definitely!

BillHi: Think for a minute, and then respond. What are some of the NATURAL things that might be in your own neighborhood might scare kids on field trips?

SuzannePT: stinging and biting insects comes to mind...fear of contracting West Nile, etc...

LeeAM: insects such as bees

SheriG: snakes, bugs

JeanMC: snakes

ElizaL: rats

MaryPatGst2: Birds and birds' nests, leaves on different kinds of trees.

DanitaC: Do you mean like squirrels or stray dogs?

JeanMC: dogs

MarleneM: bugs insects

BrentL: Bugs, snakes, ahh much of the same.

DoloresGst3: I had second grade inner city kids who were afraid to sit down on the grass.

SusanR . o O (grass snakes)

TimW: native wildlife

JeanMC: thunderstorms

SusanR: bees/wasp nests

JeanMC: allergies

LeeAM: poison ivy

BillHi: Okay, that's a good list. All of these are valid. But let's move on.

BrentL: Something other than what is in their "natural" surroundings, unfamiliar.

JeffC: I have hobo spiders living in my house.

BillHi: It's pretty interesting that Hollywood has taken advantage of these fears.

Remember Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds?"

BillHi: There have also been fear films about everything from Frogs! to Arachnophobia (Spiders) to rats to snakes.

BJ nods fearfully

BrittGst25: oh that really scared me... I hate birds

BillHi: Okay Brit, keep an open mind.

BrittGst25: welll... okay

MicheleAt: I am still afraid of birds

BillHi: So how does one deal with student--or adult--fears so that kids can go to the woods and learn about nature?

JeanMC: you must, first, convince the parents

DavidHGst21: educate them about the fears

LisaBGst20: Talk about what to expect

SuzannePT: aversion therapy?

BillHi: Let's assume you have no access to parents.

BJ: When I go into the woods, I shout, Look out snakes, here I come!

MaryPatGst2: Have class discussions about things in nature that might scare us.

BJ: o O (haven't seen a snake yet)

LeeAM: maybe bring some of these animals or insects into the classroom first

MicheleAt: Talk about their fears and why are they afraid

BillHi: Snakes have no ears.

TimW: Identify fears and discuss

BrittGst25: I agree

JeffC: that's why they never listen!

DanitaC: I agree with discuss expectations...

MaryPatGst2: Maybe you can send home a letter to the parents asking them if their children have any fears of snakes, spiders, etc.

BrittGst25: make sure to also have a plan if someone does get scared out there

KimGst8: Prepare for the worst to set fears at rest

BrittGst25: don't let them just run away screaming...

SheriG: tell them how to protect themselves and stay safe

SuzannePT: bring in some experts? zoo docents, wildlife specialists, etc.

BillHi: Good, thoughts, again. Let me move forward.

BrittGst25: but what if the school doesn't have the money to bring people in

BrentL: Start by going out in your school yard and exploring nature, the 1-meter experiment, or any other models, even just looking and listening, maybe listening with eyes closed.

MaryPatGst2: Our Primary teachers usually take their classes to the Zoo for classes.

PatGst19: Poll your parents for helpers in their areas of expertise

MaryPatGst2: Our sixth grade class goes to camp for a week also. The parents pay for their child to go,

BillHi: Please read my comments. We're moving on.

BillHi: Often when I visit a class with my 10-foot Boa Constrictor, I start out by asking for a show of hands to "How many of you think you're afraid of snakes."

BillHi: Notice my wording here.

BrittGst25: "THINK"

BillHi: Other comments?

BrittGst25: not how many ARE afraid

BillHi: Good, Britt.

BillHi: You're not born with an innate fear of snakes.

BrentL: Changing expectations.

BillHi: Someone has to teach you to fear snakes.

LeeAM: television presents snakes as scary and dangerous so children see all snakes as this

BillHi: And if someone can teach you to fear snakes, someone can teach you NOT to be afraid of them.

BrittGst25: snakes are also usually seen as evil characters

BillHi: But that's all LEARNED, not innate.

BrittGst25: so being educated about the dangers of snakes is important

BrittGst25: how to handle them and react to them is important as well

SheriG: I agree. I was taught to be afraid of snakes until I worked at a Nature center that required the use of snakes in it education programs.

BillHi: Again, a good teacher can help students recognize, deal with, and overcome fear of snakes.

BillHi: So how does a teacher do that?

BrittGst25: maybe the teacher has to overcome it first!

BillHi: Good start.

BrentL: Is snakes just a metaphor?

BillHi: Yes.

SheriG: Educate the child about the different kinds of snakes

BillHi: We're using them as an example here.

BillHi: Educate is too broad a term; be specific.

PatGst19: Snakes are very interesting animals and quite different from each other.

SheriG: Tell them which snakes could be harmful and which ones are not.

BrentL: Teach about the role snakes play and how helpful the more common snakes can be to our lives.

BrittGst25: true... what would it be like if we didn't have snakes...

MaryPatGst2: The kids enjoy finding out which ones are poisonous and which ones aren't.

BrittGst25: lots and lots of mice would roam around

JeffC: well... except for the poor kid who gets bit by the copperhead as he experiments...

PatGst19: Copperhead bites are painful but rarely deadly!

BrittGst25: he could get bit, but that is a risk just as if you were teaching kids about horses and they got kicked

BillHi: Most of these are logical approaches and may work with some kids, but fear is not always logical.

TimW: emphasize their role in the ecosystem and food chain

BillHi: Ditto.

BrittGst25: so the question is how to handle illogical fears?

BillHi: Perhaps.

BrittGst25: hmmm...

BillHi: Certainly it's important to try to "beat them with logic."

BillHi: But simply exposing them to the snake--or other scary thing--is most helpful.

SuzannePT: have the kids vocalize their fears and then do specific research to either validate or refute those fears.

MaryPatGst2: That is what I do.

BillHi: Good, Suzanne. Another way might to have some captive animals in the room--snakes, bees, etc.--so that kids see them everyday.

SolesGst46: Soles does that too

BrittGst25: yes but what if the animals become distractions?

SuzannePT: I have found having animals in the room is very helpful in dispelling myths and fears.

BillHi: If you're a good teacher, you can deal with distractions.

LisaBGst20: They get used to having the animal in the classroom and forget about it

BillHi: And, as someone said earlier, having them do research about the animal in question is helpful, especially if you do it in a creative way.

SuzannePT: When my critters get rowdy I just move them to another room

BrittGst25: maybe, but if someone has a fear of an animal and that animal is in the room, they will have issues that could be bigger than can be dealt with in the time limit you have

MaryPatGst2: I had a birdfeeder attached to my window this year for months and we were always looking at the different birds and squirrels that came to feed.

PatGst19: It is like pets at home the animals are not cared for as they should be.

BillHi: Anyone got some suggestions on creative techniques for research that might help kids overcome nature fears?

DoloresGst3: What about allergies - especially with mammals?

SolesGst46: in Soles class the animal's sounds help meditation

BillHi: We're getting off topic. We're not looking for excuses, we're looking for solutions.

SuzannePT: 2 sided brainstorm. One side is the "helpful" the other side is the "harmful". After brainstorming, do a websearch to verify

DanitaC: Maybe some "group" digital research, like seeing a life-size IMAX movie?

TimW: internet scavenger hunt on facts about the animal

BillHi: Good, Suzanne & Danita & Tim.

SheriG: For older students, a debate on both sides of the issue

MaryPatGst2: Our Zoo also has a scavenger hunt you can use with your students.

BillHi: Good, Sheri & MaryPat.

BrentL: Name as many animals as your class can think of in your local area, then pick the "dangerous" ones to research, that way the students are looking at the ones that they may encounter on the way home or in their backyard.

BillHi: Nice idea, Brent.

BillHi: Anyone else?

DanitaC: Yeah, I like too, maybe I would know what to be expecting to see, too... maybe I live 50 miles from the school...

HelenK: you could also have some pre-demo tasks completed by the students to focus their learning and assist with the process

SuzannePT: I envision some kind of STS thing where students survey the community about their fears and reasons for their fears. That way they can see if they (the student) are being logical about their fears.

BillHi: Okay, these are all good thoughts, but basically what you do for a field trip is talk about, in general, what they might expect to see. Then you take them out and talk about what you're seeing. And then when you get back you talk about how scary things were NOT.

DanitaC: Thinking long-term... maybe have students write about their experiences and then could share positive ones with students next year...

MarleneM: good idea Danita

BJ . o O (or make a book, Danita)

BJ: with digital photos taken during the trip

BillHi: Good thoughts. let's move on.

BillHi: In light of the fact that we're using an on-line forum for this discussion, let's talk about the scavenger hunt concept.

BillHi: And let's limit it to the Internet.

BJ knows Bill has a lot of resources at hiltonpond.org

BillHi: These days, most tech-oriented kids are really eager to do on-line scavenger hunts.

BillHi: BJ, don't get ahead of me.

BJ sits on her hands

BillHi: I could at this point, ask you to go to Google and type in "snake" and you'd get about a jillion Web sites.

BradGst49: Are there enough students who aren't internet savvy to question using it universally?

SuzannePT: yes

BrentL: As an elementary teacher I know it is extremely important to have some sort of hyperlink document with sites right there for students to click on so they do not get lost or to sites I don't want them on.

BillHi: Okay, but we're making impediments again instead of talking about what WILL work. We're assuming there's at least one computer available per classroom.

BillHi: What I'd like to do is direct you to the Web site for Hilton Pond Center. When you get there, stay on the main page.

BillHi: It's at <http://www.hiltonpond.org>

BillHi: Just click on the URL.

BJ . o O (if you have trouble opening the url, use the ctrl button on your keyboard when you click on the url)

BillHi: Let's remember that the topic for today was "A Midsummer's NightMARE" (with no offense to Shakespeare).

BillHi: Each week on this Web site I publish an original photo essay about nature. This week I had to have one about something scary.

BrentL: At night?

BillHi: So scroll down now and click on "Beneficial Paper Wasps" under "This Week at Hilton Pond."

BillHi: Maybe kids dream--at night--about stinging insects.

SuzannePT: Your photography is superb!

SuzannePT: What camera are you using?

BillHi: Anyway, spend a few minutes looking at this page and then let us know ONE thing you see or read that could be used to help kids--or YOU--overcome fear of stinging Paper Wasps.

BillHi: If the URL is loading slowly it's because there are so many of you.

SheriG: They did not sting you as you went in and out of the building.

JeffC: If you're having trouble with students getting to sites that you don't want them to visit... use Trackstar to build a webpage and lessons for your students.

<http://trackstar.hprtec.org>

BillHi: Thanks, Sheri.

BillHi: Others?

SuzannePT: I think the fact that these are pictures of wasps doing wasp things and not stinging things is pretty persuasive

LeighAnGst54: The wasps are important pollinators as well as predators of pesky garden insects. They are more helpful than potentially harmful.

BillHi: Good, LeighAnn.

BillHi: Thanks, Suzanne & Danita. More about the camera at the end.

BrentL: The sheer design precision is amazing, mathematical, and any other connections you can think of.

BillHi: Good, Brent. CROSS-DISCIPLINARY learning is always helpful.

PatGst19: The wasp site was interesting

BradGst58: In dealing with fears, it seems like basic understanding of anything will help reduce fears. The more we know, the less we will fear. In other words, it is often the unknown that fosters fear.

LeighAnGst54: Good point

BillHi: Yep, Brad, you pretty much just summed it up.

MicheleAt: The closer we get slowly to what we are afraid, the better we overcome our fear

BillHi: A good teacher uses all the tools at his/her disposal to get kids to learn--or UNlearn--things of importance.

BillHi: The first step is role-modeling.

BillHi: In this case, if the teacher stands up and screams at the sight of a Paper wasp, the learning opportunity is pretty much lost.

TroysGst49: so a teacher must deal with some of their own fears first to teach effectively

BillHi: Then you immerse them in information, some of which you might offer in lecture, some of which they dig up on their own.

BillHi: Immersion can also occur by having animals in the classroom, doing the Internet scavenger hunt, seeing an iMax movie, etc.

ScottieGst56: How then do you deal with a topic a students brings to class that you are very fearful of?

TroysGst49: I usually meditate

BillHi: But in the case of the paper wasps--which might actually be nesting on your school building--you might even assign student to go out and observe and sketch and photograph. (Being cautious, of course.)

BJ: how about doing research with the student, Scottie...and doing all the other things Bill and the others suggested to overcome your fears

BillHi: As a teacher, never say "eeyeeuw" or "yuck."

BillHi: Those are the sounds of a closed mind.

MarleneM: ha ha

BJ: o O (or cute)

BillHi: An open minded teacher or student says "Ahhhhh," the sound of learning.

BJ: Thanks, Bill!

BJ: Our time is about up....

ScottieGst56: What if you had a traumatic experience though?

BillHi: Great discussion. We gotta go. Camera info is at

<http://www.hiltonpond.org/TechnicalInfoMain.html>

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

SheriG: Thanks for a great discussion>

SuzannePT: thanks !

DanitaC: Thanks!

MarleneM: thank you

TimW: Thanks Bill

MRobertGst60: I work as a supervisor at the Oregon zoo and one thing I tell the kids is when you are dealing with animals and first time viewers it is essential that the educator remain calm when something happens; the reaction of the educator will teach the student the same negative behavior

TroysGst49: Soles says thank you all!

RussellH: thank you

JeanMC: Thanks Bill; good job

LeeAM: thanks Bill

BrentL: Thanks

PatGst19: Thanks Bill

MaryPatGst2: Thanks, Bill

BJ cheers for Bill...wonderful!

WexGst4 applauds Bill's presentation

DoloresGst3: thanks, Bill