

TEACHING TIP OF THE MONTH

Theme: Tips for Earth Day Integrative Learning Activities

Tip 1: iNaturalist App

This year we celebrate Earth Day 2022 amidst serious challenges to global biodiversity and species loss. By connecting student learning in our classrooms to key contemporary crises like this, we can advance more meaningful and impactful outcomes for students in a variety of subjects. One open-access tool for doing this is an app and website called iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>). This is a global community of citizen scientists where anyone can take photos of plants, insects, and animals and submit them for crowdsourced identification. This information can help scientists around the world track important indicators of biodiversity and other topics while at the same time involving our students as citizen scientists in their communities. In the course Human Evolution and Archaeology (ANTH215), Professor Zev Cossin used iNaturalist as part of an ethnobotany assignment created as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Open Pedagogy Faculty Fellowship. His students conducted weed “bioblitzes” of plants growing around the Rockville and Germantown campuses. Once they were identified in the app, students researched the botanical and cultural histories and potential edible and medicinal properties of these plants. Overall, students began to see how our landscape management practices needlessly eradicate plants that can serve positive purposes in society. Human-plant relationships need to be re-thought in more sustainable ways. This app could be used in any discipline to engage students in meaningful citizen science that helps them attain course outcomes while appreciating major challenges of our times this Earth Day!

For more information about this tip, contact Zev.Cossin@montgomerycollege.edu.

Tip 2: Ecocriticism

The annual observance of Earth Day invites multiple opportunities for awareness and action in the classroom and beyond. Ecocriticism, the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment, is one way to engage students in critical thinking and reading about nature and then encourage action, as explained in this [introduction on Ecocriticism](#). In their “[Climate Change in Literature](#)” presentation at [MC’s 2021 Annual STEAM event](#), Professors Cinder Cooper Barnes (English) and Victoria Schneider (Environmental Biology) explain ecocriticism and present questions that invite students to think critically about the literature with environmental themes; however, ecocriticism is not limited to literature courses. Since it “draws on contributions from natural scientists, writers, literary critics, anthropologists, and historians” (see “[What is Ecocriticism?](#)”), ecocriticism can occur across disciplines. For example, instructors can incorporate the following questions in courses such as history, philosophy, visual art, or women’s and gender studies to engage students in ecocriticism:

- *How has the concept of nature changed over time?*
- *How is nature empowered or oppressed in the work?*
- *How do the roles or representations of men and women towards the environment differ in this play/film/text/etc.?*

For information about this tip, contact Cinder.Cooper@montgomerycollege.edu or Victoria.Schneider@montgomerycollege.edu

More Info on Teaching Tips

“Teaching Tips of the Month” began as a project of Program for Active Learning in STEM (PALS) and Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM (TIDES) grants. Many thanks to Ray Gonzales and Alla Webb, who served as Principal Investigators of the TIDES grants. You can view archived Teaching Tips of the Month on [The Hub](#). We welcome feedback and invite you to submit ideas for this publication to Angela Lanier, angela.lanier@montgomerycollege.edu

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