

## MINDFULNESS IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: PROMOTING STEWARDSHIP, CONNECTING TO NATURE, AND DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

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Creating the next generation of environmental stewards requires an intimate understanding of place and purpose in environmental work. Identifying belonging and meaning in a place can be aided by mindfulness practices such as contemplation, observation, and reflection. For my capstone project, I was interested in student engagement with restoration and environmental education with the Student Conservation Association. I hypothesized that including mindfulness activities in environmental education and restoration could inspire a stronger connection to nature and overall sense of stewardship, helping to motivate future stewards to continue environmental work by building meaningful personal connections. Restoration can be demanding and difficult with results that are slow to see, which can lead to disenchantment with the work when clear personal and emotional connections to the projects are not pursued. Seeing these challenges, I designed a series of twelve lesson plans that incorporate mindfulness practices in environmental education activities. Students who participated in these activities were surveyed before and after they engaged in mindfulness to gauge their connection to nature and sense of stewardship. The results show that after participating in mindfulness activities students feel more connected to nature and a stronger sense of stewardship. Additionally, students reported an increased variety of feelings, indicating that time for private reflection emboldens students to access more emotional states. The activities guide students towards building intimate, lasting connections to natural places driven by their own curiosity and comfort. My project shows that incorporating mindfulness gives students the tools to develop deep connections to the natural world.