



**UBC**  
**Botanical**  
**Garden**

**Educational**  
**Resource**  
**For Teachers**

# Whispers of Nitobe Memorial Garden: Learning from Nature's Design

2025

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## RESOURCE OVERVIEW

### Lesson Plan

Grade 3-5 – English Language Arts, Social Studies, Arts Education

Tianhong Zheng (Cici)

June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## Whispers of Nitobe Memorial Garden

Learning from Nature's Design

### Overview

This immersive lesson transforms Nitobe Memorial Garden into a living classroom where grades 3-5 students explore the intersection of Japanese aesthetics and BC's natural environment. Through shadow tracing activities, students capture intricate plant silhouettes while learning about photosynthesis and light patterns, merging scientific observation with artistic documentation. The garden serene atmosphere inspires haiku poetry compositions, where students distill their sensory experiences into precise 5-7-5 syllable reflections. Cultural connections unfold as learners compare traditional Japanese garden design with Indigenous approaches to land stewardship, deepening their understanding of human-nature relationships. Pre-visit preparations establish foundational knowledge of garden symbolism and poetic forms, while post-visit activities challenge students to synthesize their tracings, poems, and reflections into cohesive nature poetry artwork. These creative products demonstrate growing competencies across Arts Education (visual representation), Language Arts (poetic expression), Social Studies (cultural comparisons), and Science (ecosystem and light), all while fostering mindfulness and place-based learning. The lesson's strength lies in its seamless integration of disciplines, using the garden as both muse and classroom to reveal how art and science beautifully intertwine in our natural and cultural landscape.

### Core Competencies

#### *Communication:*

- Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding
  1. Haiku peer workshops: students share drafts and give feedback using nature-based vocabulary
  2. Group reflections: discuss how garden sounds/textures inspire

### Curricular Competencies

Students will be able to:

1. Make connections between ideas from a variety of sources and prior knowledge to build understanding
2. Engage actively as listeners, viewers, and readers, as appropriate, to develop understanding of self, identity, and

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poetic word choices

### *Thinking:*

- Transform ideas and information to create original texts
  1. Crafting haikus that merge scientific observations with emotional resonance
- Consider alternative perspectives
  1. Compare poetic descriptions of the garden (student haikus vs. traditional Japanese nature poetry)

### *Personal and Social:*

- Explain how aspects of stories/places reflect personal heritage or identity
  1. Reflect on how their haikus reveal personal connections to nature vs. cultural traditions seen in the garden

community

3. Plan and create a variety of communication forms for different purposes and audiences

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## Big Ideas

Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world

## Objectives

Students will demonstrate interdisciplinary understanding of how cultural values and artistic expression intersect in natural environments by:

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## Content

Students will understand:

1. Literary elements and devices
  - Descriptive language, poetic language, figurative language, images, imagery, rhythm, simile, alliteration

1. Investigating plant adaptations and light response through shadow tracing
2. Creating haiku poetry that synthesizes sensory observations
3. Comparing Japanese and Indigenous relationships with cultivated landscapes
4. Expressing ecological and cultural connections through mixed-media art

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## Cross-curricular + Trans-disciplinary Connections and Critical

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## Questions

1. **Social Studies:** compare Japanese garden design (controlled harmony) with Indigenous land stewardship (reciprocal relationships)
    - How do the garden's design choices reflect cultural values about nature?
    - What can traditional Japanese and Indigenous practices teach us about sustainable ecosystems?
  2. **Arts:** shadow tracing as scientific document and artistic expression of light/form
    - How can art help us to stay calm and pay attention to little things in our nature environment?
    - What symbols in the garden communicate meaning without words?
  3. **Science:** study plants adaptations (e.g., leaf shapes for light capture) through tracing and biodiversity mapping
    - Why do plants in shaded area of the garden have different structures than those in sunlight?
    - How does human design (like pruning) mimic or disrupt natural ecosystems?
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## Equity and Diversity

This lesson promotes equity and diversity by integrating multiple cultural perspectives and inviting students to reflect on whose stories are represented or missing in such spaces. It supports diverse learners through multimodal activities and language scaffolds, while ensuring accessibility with low-cost materials and virtual alternatives. Critical questions prompt students to analyze power dynamics in land use, and choice-based tasks allow them to demonstrate learning in ways that honor their cultural backgrounds and abilities. By framing the garden as a place of dialogue rather than a static cultural artifact, the lesson validates all students' lived experiences while expanding their understanding of human-nature relationships across cultures.

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## First Peoples' Principles of Learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational
  - Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story
  - Learning involves patience and time
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### Materials:

- Clip boards
- Drawing papers
- Pencils/Coloring supplies
- Haiku samples
- Sensory bingo [alternative]

### Duration:

60–90-minute garden visit [garden tour + shadow tracing art] + 80-minute in class [1 lesson pre-visit, 1 lesson post-visit]

### Introduction + Minds On

Before the Tour

Hook: Begin by showing students a striking image of Nitobe Memorial Garden (e.g., the lantern reflected in the pond) and ask: *“If this garden could speak, what stories might it talk about nature, culture, and people?”*

Minds-On Exploration:

#### 1. Sensor Imaging (3 min)

- Have students close their eyes while you play 30 seconds of nature sounds (water, wind, birds)
- Ask: What plants, animals, or designs do you picture in a garden?

#### 2. Cultural Artifact Inquiry (10-15 min)

- Show a real image of a traditional Japanese tsukubai (stone water basin) and a Coast Salish cedar basket
- Discuss in pairs or groups: How do both objects show relationships between people and nature?

#### 3. Haiku Warm-up (15-20 min) [Mandatory for pre-visit]

- Share a model haiku about the nature and invite students to read out loud: <https://www.readpoetry.com/10-vivid-haikus-to-leave-you-breathless/>
- Introduce students to the 5-7-5 syllable poetry technique and do a demonstration as a class: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bHxSMXU56Q>

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- Students write a 3-line quick draft about a plant in their neighborhood, focusing on sensory words: <https://litinfocus.com/free-printable-pdf-100-sensory-words-list/>

### Lesson

#### At the Garden

Students will explore the garden through both guided cultural learning and independent artistic/scientific observation, then synthesize their experiences. (\*A big class group of more than 15 students would have to switch\*)

#### Group 1: Guided Tour

- Follow the guide to learn about:
  - i) Japanese garden design principles (e.g., cherry blossom, pond, waterfall, lantern, bridge, Koi, symbolism of water/rocks, tea house)
  - ii) Dr. Nitobe's legacy and cultural connections to BC

Critical Question: How does the garden design reflect diverse cultures? How does students gain reconciliation from the tour?

Student Role: record 1 observation (e.g., understand the symbolism of a design) and 1 question (e.g., why does this island resemble a turtle?) to discuss later on

#### Group 2: Shadow Tracing & Haiku

- Shadow tracing:
  - i) Use clipboards and paper to trace shadows of leaves/flowers/branches at different time (Elements such as water, koi fish, and tea house are difficult to capture through shadow tracing. Students may opt to draw these instead)
  - ii) Label the name of the plants/flowers/designs
- Haiku drafting:
  - i) Write a 5-7-5 syllable poem inspired by sensory observations in the garden (e.g., sound of water, moss textures, smell of the plants)

#### \*\*Alternative Activity – Sensory Bingo

If the shadow-tracing activity isn't feasible due to shifting weather conditions, Sensory Bingo serves as a good backup option. After finishing the bingo, students may pick a quiet, personal spot in the garden to compose their own haiku.

This picture-based bingo game is specially designed for young explorers visiting Nitobe Memorial Garden. Using simple, recognizable icons, it encourages children to engage their senses while discovering the beauty of this traditional Japanese garden.

- Visual & Verbal Prompts: each square features a clear image with a term or

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short phrase that help students to identify the items

- Multi-Sensory Exploration: students check off squares by sight, sound, touch, smell and movement

**Critical Questions:** How does observing/tracing shadows/poetry write help us with well-being, senses and calmness? What did you notice about the shape of the plants and light sources while tracing?

**Student Role:** create at least 2 tracing and 1 haiku to contribute to a class discussion/post-visit lesson

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### Debrief + Consolidation

After the Tour

Students will synthesize their learning from the garden visit by connecting cultural insights, scientific observations, and artistic creations.

#### Group Sharing Circle:

- Pair students to share haiku and ask volunteers to share and read their poems to the class (students show their respect, good listening skill and appreciation to peers' creativities)
- Prompts:
  1. What was the most surprising thing you learned about the garden's design or history?
  2. How did shadow tracing or poetry change how you see nature?
  3. How does the garden reflect Japanese cultures?
- Create a class anchor chart and draw down all the ideas according to students' experiences at the garden
- Students submit their final work for display

**Exit Slip:** students write or draw on a sticky note: "One way I can respect nature like the garden teaches us is..."

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A sample of the haiku artwork and sensory bingo attached below. Please also encourage students to add colors and details to their haiku artwork.