Nature Nuggets

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EDOE 543: Environmental Ministries

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Introduction

The following outlines are for nature nuggets developed to present to students at Inez Wrenn Seventh-day Adventist School in Crossville, Tennessee. The titles of the nature nuggets that I have actually presented in fulfillment of the requirements of EDOE 543 are in bold. At the end of the nature nugget outlines, I will conclude with a reflection on the experience of sharing one of the nature nuggets. This nature nugget was also submitted in audio format. Some of these nature nuggets are designed to be presented in conjunction with some nature artifacts that I can carry around with me. Other nature nuggets are designed to share on the spur of the moment in the field as we come in contact with the various natural entities discussed here.

**Antlers**

1. Black Box (bag, or other container) for mystery
2. Use the “3 Stories” Technique Dr. Swafford shared with us. Tell 3 possible stories and ask the students to guess which one is true.
   1. Story One: I was hiking through Yellowstone several years ago when I noticed a grizzly bear feeding on a dead deer. Because it was a nice buck, I wanted the antlers really bad. The grizzly bear was scary enough that I knew I probably shouldn’t try to get the antlers, but I started thinking: if I came back later maybe I could grab them when the bear wasn’t around. When I returned the next day, sure enough, the bear was nowhere to be seen. I crept up to the skeleton of the buck and pulled the two antlers off and started to leave. I heard a rustling sound in the brush behind me and saw the bear come running out. Apparently he had been hanging around waiting to eat another meal and thought I was stealing his food. Thankfully my car was close by and I just barely made it and jumped in before the bear got to me. I sped away before he destroyed my car.
   2. Story Two: I was out on a nice early spring hike in Colorado to a lake I had been wanting to visit. Anyone know why I might want to visit a lake? *Fishing…* On this particular trip I was just sight seeing and scouting for a future trip. While I was hiking along, I enjoyed looking at the stream that was below the lake. Eventually I hiked all the way up the stream to the dam that formed the lake. I had to scramble up the steep dam but eventually got to the top. In front of me was one of the prettiest lakes I ever saw. As I was walking along the shore-line, I noticed a pair of antlers that had been left there. Apparently the deer who owned them got tired of them. I always wanted a matching set of antlers, so I ran over and grabbed them before someone else beat me to it. I was afraid it might be illegal to pick them up because I didn’t know if there were any rules about it, but I decided it was worth the risk and carried them back to my car with me. I’ve kept them ever since.
   3. Story Three: I was on my honeymoon in the Great Smoky Mountains. Every winter or early spring, bucks shed the antlers from the previous season and get ready to grow a new pair. I saw a large buck with two loose looking antlers. Even though it was probably illegal, I decided to see if I could chase him through the woods until he dropped the antlers. I figured that maybe when he started running, he might bump them against a tree or branch and they would fall off. Sure enough, I snuck up close and then hollered. He took off really fast and knocked his antlers against a tree branch and they both fell off. I grabbed them and put them in my trunk before a ranger saw me with them.
3. Let students guess which one is true.
4. Tell them about how a buck will lose his antlers each year and why he grows them. The reason the buck gets rid of his old antlers is because he is going to get better ones. You all get rid of something every year because you are going to get something better. Can you think of anything that would fit that description? (age arguably, grade level). Why do we get rid of those things? Because we are hoping for something better in return. God asks us to get rid of things and get new things also. He asks us to get rid of our old nature to get a Godly nature. Let’s look at three different scriptures that talk about that.
5. Romans 6:6, 23 OR Ephesians 4:22-24 OR Colassians 3:8-10.
6. How do we put on the image of Jesus? Ask for Him to be in our life, our hearts, and our minds. So, just like the buck puts off his old antlers to get something better, let’s all put off our old self so that we can be renewed in the image of Jesus.

**Friends**

1. Two Chickadees I watched recently talking back and forth (companion calls). They moved about the forest feeding but always staying in touch constantly.
2. Matthew 7:12 – “Therefore, whatever you want me to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Why do the birds want their friends to check in on them? There are lots of things in the woods that are not friendly to little birds. By checking in, they show their care for each other.
3. How do we check in with our friends and show that we care? Why is it good to show our friends that we care about them?
4. Let’s all be good friends and show how much we care about each other just like the little chickadees in the woods watch out for each other.

Early Wildflowers

1. Some of the earliest wildflowers start blooming in February (or maybe even January). Why do they bloom so early?
2. Wildflowers bloom before the leaves come out on the trees because they need lots of sunlight. Once the leaves are on the trees, it will be a lot shadier in the woods and they wouldn’t get enough sunlight.
3. What good are all these early wildflowers? They provide an important source of food to early season bees and other insects that rely on them for food when the nights are still cold.
4. Many of you are still in an early season in life. Read I Timothy 4:12. Sometimes it seems like we don’t have a very important job to do. However, just like those early wildflowers are important, each of you is also important. What are some things that you can do for those around you that maybe no one else can do? How can you be an example to others to help them get to know Jesus better?
5. Each season of life provides opportunities for greatness. We learned from Jesus that greatness is serving. How are you going to serve others today? Plan how you can do something to help someone else out. Something that maybe only you can do…

Whiter Than Snow

1. What is the whitest thing you can think of? Snow…
2. How many of you enjoy playing in snow? When I was young, I was always really excited to get a snow day. We would always go sledding on a small hill beside our house. One year, we had friends living just down the road from us and they had some larger hills. We would walk down to their house and go sledding for hours when we had a good snow.
3. The interesting thing about snow is its color. What provides a nice contrast, and more importantly it covers up everything underneath it leaving just a perfect white coating. Why is snow white?
4. Snow is made up of ice crystals. Those ice crystals reflect light. Because they reflect all light, they appear white.
5. We are all asked to appear white as well. In Isaiah 1:18, we read “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” Revelation 3:5 says that “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments…” Later in Isaiah, we see another analogy about white garments in chapter 61 verse 10: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.”
6. One of my favorite Christian authors says this about that robe of righteousness: “When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness” (COL 312).
7. Today, will you accept the righteousness that Jesus offers? Will you submit yourself to Christ?
8. *Handout a small notecard with the above quote on it to each student*.

**Tracking**

1. What signs do animals and birds leave of their passing? Tracks, poop, signs of feeding.
2. If you want to understand an animal and learn more about it, you would follow its tracks and see what it has been up to, where it has gone, and maybe even who it has visited. Following in the animal’s footsteps helps us learn more about it.
3. Native Americans were excellent trackers and could follow an animal by noticing signs that most of us would miss. Why were they so good? They were observant, learned lots about what they were tracking, and entered nature as an equal. Most important, they were completely focused on their surroundings and the animals they were tracking. They could follow an animal wherever it went. They were so good, that they could act like many of the animals. Hunted buffalo by wearing wolf skins, could escape someone by wearing elk hoofs so someone wouldn’t see “people” tracks, etc.
4. Why aren’t we as observant and focused on our surroundings these days? We tend to focus on ourselves more than we should.
5. As Christians, we are called to follow in Someone’s tracks. Luke 9:23. *Read verse*. What does Jesus mean in this verse? What does it mean to deny yourself? Denying myself means that I’m not focused on me. I’m focused instead on following Jesus. Every time He called a new disciple, He said, “Follow Me.”
6. What does following in His footsteps look like? It means learning everything there is to know about Him, learning His every move. Let’s look at II Corinthians 3:18. If we are learning everything there is to know about Jesus and studying His every move, what will that do to us? It will change us to be like Him, in the *same image*. Then, our footsteps will begin to look like His footsteps, our thoughts will look like His thoughts, and our actions will look like His actions.
7. So, just like the Native Americans could follow an animal everywhere it went because they had studied it and knew so much about it, let’s follow Jesus wherever He leads by learning more about Him and getting to know Him as our best friend.

Eureka!

1. Show students my vial of gold dust. Tell them a couple of stories about where I got it and let them guess which one is true.
   1. I was wandering around the country one summer. I had already drove to the west coast, up through California, and up to Oregon. While in California I did a little bit of gold panning and found a little gold. That got me thinking about it. When I was wandering east from Oregon, the next state was Idaho of course. As I drove along, I thought it would be awesome to go out into the wild and discover gold for myself. So, I started driving out into the country. When I was far from anyone, I found a stream and got out of my car. I dug out my trusty gold pan and started panning. Sure enough! I started finding gold dust! I still wonder what would have happened if I had stayed there and kept panning. Maybe I would be rich today.
   2. My great great grandfather was in the California gold rush and struck it rich. This is a family souvenir that has been passed down from father to son to help us remember the founder of our family and how he made his fortune.
   3. My sister took a trip to Alaska and on that trip they did some gold panning. She found a little bit of gold dust, and since my sister knows that I love collecting rocks, she put it in a collection vial and gave it to me as a present.
   4. Which story is true?
2. Back in the California Gold Rush, people would leave everything behind for a chance to strike it rich in the gold fields. Many people ended up completely broke in their pursuit of gold. A lucky few came away fabulously wealthy.
3. In the Bible, Jesus tells the story of someone who gave up everything to gain something that was worth a lot. In Matthew 13:45-46, He says that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who was looking for pearls. “When he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”
4. God wants us to search for Him harder than all of the gold seekers looked for gold, harder than the merchant in Jesus’ parable looked for just the right pearl. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” Mathew 6:33.

Showing Off

1. Recently I was walking around a small lake with my family. Normally there are a LOT of ducks, but I only noticed a few. They were mostly males. Then I saw one lone female with nine fluffy babies following behind. It occurred to me that the females were probably mostly still nesting. But where were their nests?
2. I kept a sharp eye out as we walked, hoping to see one. I looked around and under bushes, in tall grass along the banks, in the landscaping nearby, but no ducks or nests could be found.
3. We were almost around the lake when I noticed a gorgeous mallard drake standing on top of a huge potted plant that was part of the landscaping in this nice neighborhood lake. I wondered what he was doing up there. Suddenly it occurred to me. Why do you think he was up there?
4. He was hanging out with his lady! She was hunkered down and not moving at all. But she was there, sitting on a nest. By spending time showing off, this mallard male was endangering his wife and their nest. Instead of strutting around the nest being proud, he should have been staying down at the lake. Luckily, I was not a predator looking for a fresh duck or duck egg dinner or else they would have been in trouble.
5. Sometimes, it is easy for us to show off also. When we do, we get ourselves and those we care about in trouble. I Peter 5:6. Instead of showing off, focus on staying humble so that God can use you in His time. The mallard drake can show off his family in just a few short days as long as he does not risk endangering their lives by showing off now. Be patient. Good things are just over the horizon.

Clouds

1. What are clouds? Let kids have time to think and answer the question. Continue a discussion if some clarification is needed.
2. People used to use the clouds to forecast the weather. There are some famous sayings that help you remember what weather is about to come. For example:
   1. Red sky at night, sailors’ delight. Red sky at morning, sailors take warning.
   2. April showers bring May flowers.
3. Jesus noticed that people were good at forecasting the weather in His day. Matthew 16:2-3. Today, we are good at noticing things that we seen on TV in the news. We know what is going on in the world around us. We are better than ever at forecasting the weather. Yet, do we realize what all of these things really mean?
4. God has revealed the future to us. We need to study our Bible and commit to studying the “signs of the times”. Let’s all learn God’s plan for us and our world.

Dragons of the Air

1. One of the world’s fiercest hunters can fly and it is deadly. It attacks without mercy and is successful in killing its prey better than 95% of the time.
2. This hunter is also a lot of fun to watch. One afternoon, I was sitting beside a stream in the Smokies when I spotted one of these hunters flying around above the water. It buzzed back and forth, so intent on its mission that it didn’t notice me. I watched in awe as it spotted first one bug and then another, attacking them on the wing and capturing every single one. The bugs it was eating? Little mayflies and Caddisflies.
3. What was the great predator? A dragonfly!
4. Yes, these are truly some of the most dangerous creatures for their size. Imagine if these were the size of a car and ate cows instead. Talk about terrifying! Thankfully they are not that large. In fact, they are one of the coolest bugs out there. They help eat things like mosquitos and flies.
5. The Bible talks about a dragon that *is* out to get us. In I Peter 5:8, it says that “our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” How successful do you think the devil wants to be in his attacks? Better than the dragonfly. How can we defeat him? If we keep reading, I Peter 5:9 goes on to say “Resist him, steadfast in the faith…” Our faith in God is what enables us to defeat the devil. So, ask God to give you the strength in Jesus to have victory over the devil.

Sharks’ Teeth

1. Pull out some sharks teeth and ask students what they think it is.
2. Tell them about all of the fossilized sharks teeth that are still getting washed up on certain beaches around the world.
3. The interesting think to me about sharks’ teeth is that they have so many in their mouth. In fact, they are continuously making new teeth to replace ones that fall out. Over the course of their life, some sharks might loose as many as 35,000 teeth! Have any of you lost teeth lately? If you lost one tooth every day of your life, you would have to live over 100 years to lose that many teeth.
4. I am thankful that God designed us to only have to lose our teeth once. Why do we lose our teeth? Because we grow bigger and need bigger teeth as adults. Since God only gave us one set of teeth for our whole adult life, we need to take good care of the ones we have. We can brush our teeth and floss carefully. What are some other things we can do to take care of our teeth? Discuss ideas…

Reflection On the Antlers Nature Nugget

The “Antlers” nature nugget went very well and provided the perfect segue into my first outdoor class with the students. I really enjoyed watching the amazement pass over the students’ faces as I told the first story. By the second story they were suspicious that something was up, but during the first story they were right there with me. My “black box” was a duffel bag. Ideally, I would really like to make a true “black box” book, but I am not sure when that will happen.

Many of the students were excited when I pulled the antlers out, and they were even more excited when I started passing them around. Most of the kids had never touched any antlers before so it was a neat experience for them. I especially like how the stories that I told allowed me to discuss some ethical issues as well even if it was in passing. Discussing how it was not legal to chase deer around hoping their antlers will fall off or even collecting things in the National Park in general was probably a good idea. I do not want to hear about any of them getting in trouble for chasing deer in Cades Cove.

I enjoyed the interaction with the students when I asked them what things they lose every year. I got some very insightful answers that showed me they have been paying attention in school. One thing I always appreciate about interacting with young people is the depth of their answers. They are always much smarter than people generally give them credit for.

The transition to the spiritual lesson was effective while at the same time leaving open the possibility of other lessons learned. We moved outside after this nature nugget, and took time for the students to look for things in nature that fit in the same category as the antlers (things that are lost or discarded or shed every year). Obviously many students came up with the idea of leaves. Others came up with some more interesting ideas that allowed us to have a discussion on what things are lost on purpose as part of a nature process and which things are lost more inadvertently.

Overall, I really enjoyed both developing and presenting this nature nugget. I think it would be fun to assign the students to develop nature nuggets as well. As I mentioned, I am always amazed at the depth of their answers when dealing with creative assignments and ideas. I am looking forward to the opportunity to present more of these to the students in the near future!