



## **SHINRIN-YOKU ACTIVITY**

OSUN Connected Learning Contest Winner

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**Course: Survey of Modern East Asian History**

This assignment was one of the first that I created as our school transitioned from in-person teaching and learning to remote instruction during the Spring 2020 semester. Our transition occurred in mid-March, and it was a stressful time for everyone - from managing new social realities linked to the spread of COVID-19 to learning to navigate the remote instructional environment. I originally planned to structure a class around shinrin-yoku in the later Spring when better weather would permit a more pleasant experience; however, due to the closure, I decided to assign this as a remote learning activity. Students were provided with contextual information on shinrin-yoku, and were asked to take their walk after engaging with the provided material. Because this was a subjective activity, students could effectively direct their own walk, and share their experience without fear of being "wrong." Students were eager to share their experiences in our Jupiter discussion forum, submitting written responses, photos, and even short films. The assignment likewise enabled the creation of an online community in the discussion forum. This assignment aligned with my course objectives, and allowed students to continue to explore the idea of mindfulness in the context of East Asian philosophical traditions that were previously discussed in class prior to the school's closure.

### **Survey of Modern East Asian History**

This course serves as an introduction to the historical, cultural, political, philosophical, and economic realities of China, Japan, and Korea, from the seventeenth century to the contemporary era. In this class, we will trace the historical development of East Asian civilizations through engagement with primary source readings, narrative excerpts, films, objects, artwork, and other materials. Encounters between Asians and foreigners will be discussed, along with concurrent themes like Orientalism and European imperialism. The

class will culminate with an examination of contemporary issues faced by those living in modern East Asian nation states.

### **Practical and pedagogical value**

This activity worked because it allowed students to be creative, and from the student perspective it appears to be a directive to "just take a walk." However, what was clear to me after reading through and viewing the individual student responses was how closely each student worked to embrace some element of shinrin-yoku practice. Students described in great detail how the activity gave them 'permission' to take a minute for themselves - to relax, take a deep breath, and explore their own backyard or neighborhood with fresh eyes. The assignment is relatively easy to implement, and while it aligned well with my East Asian history course, it can be utilized in practically any discipline, particularly when an instructor wants to encourage students to stop, take a deep breath, and recognize just how far they have come to get to this current moment.

I shared the assignment via a Jupiter discussion board. Because the assignment was relatively subjective in nature, there were not many technological expectations in place. Students should have access to a computer, tablet, or phone that is connected to the internet, so that responses can be shared to an online discussion forum. Students could simply walk to a place that they were comfortable with, and then write down a narrative of their experience. Other students employed technology, with many using their phones to take photos, or make short films or TikTok videos chronicling their experience and their feelings after their shinrin-yoku walk was completed. The assignment can be tailored to engage more with technology if desired; or it can stand alone as an activity with the primary goal of teaching students how to engage in a mindfulness exercise in a seemingly effortless fashion.

### **The assignment**

As part of our transition to distance learning, students were asked to take time to go for a walk, embracing elements of Japanese shinrin-yoku ("forest bathing") practice. In class, students previously learned about other practices that promoted mindfulness and relaxation, ranging from Daoist readings to Zen meditation. Students were provided with materials to learn about the origin and practice of shinrin-yoku. In this exercise, students were asked to take a short walk of at least ten minutes. The walk could take place anywhere - in a backyard, around a block, in a park - the choice was left up to the student; however, during the walk, students were asked to engage in elements of shinrin-yoku practice. Students were asked to observe their surroundings - what did they hear, feel, smell, notice? They were also asked to focus on their breathing throughout the walk. How did the walk

make them feel? After, students shared their experiences with shinrin-yoku in an online Jupiter discussion forum.

**Objective:** After completing this activity, students will be familiar with the Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku, or “forest bathing,” an activity created to promote mindfulness, relaxation, and physical and mental well-being. Students will learn the basic principles of shinrin-yoku, and will then be tasked with utilizing these practices in the context of a walk. Students will share their experiences in a discussion forum, demonstrating their completion of the assignment and broader understanding of shinrin-yoku as a modern practice.

**Previous Knowledge Needed:** Students should reflect on prior class discussions and readings about other activities that promote mindfulness, including reading sections of the *Daodejing*, Zen koans, and meditation practices.

**Materials Needed:** Short film *Introduction to Shinrin-yoku* via Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUFbMIGcxkM>

Article, “Forest Bathing is Great For Your Health: Here’s How to Do It,” by Dr. Qing Li:

<https://time.com/5259602/japanese-forest-bathing/>

**Activities:**

1. After reviewing the shared materials on shinrin-yoku, students should plan to take a walk of at least ten minutes.
2. Students will focus on their breathing and will practice being mindful while on their walk. They should pay attention to what they see, hear, smell, notice, and how they feel.
3. Students will share their experiences via a Jupiter discussion forum and are encouraged to respond to classmate posts to enhance remote engagement. I will likewise share my own shinrin-yoku experience with students, and will reply to each student post.

**Assessment:** I will review each student’s post for evidence of activity completion and comprehension of the principles of shinrin-yoku.

**Differentiation:** The activity is subjective, and thus differentiated since it allows students with varying abilities to complete the activity and share a response based upon their own unique experience.