



2021

## Islandwood Summer Programs Intern

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*Western Washington University*

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**Internship Title:** Islandwood Summer Programs Intern

**Student Name:** Nika Lee

**Internship Dates:** 6/22/2021 – 8/06/2021

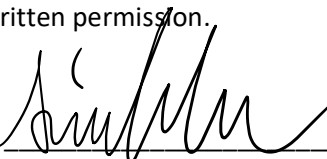
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**STUDENT SIGNATURE** 

**DATE:** 10/03/2021

**Internship at Islandwood, Bainbridge Island**

**Summer 2021**

**Nika Lee**

This summer, 2021, I interned with Islandwood on Bainbridge Island. Islandwood offers internship opportunities for seven people each summer and pairs them with an experienced co-instructor who will function as the interns' mentor for the duration of the summer. Together, the intern and mentor teach six to seven weeks of outdoor education day camps, each with its own topic. The instructors act as curriculum planners, teachers, and behavioral managers for each week, with the goal of engaging the student's curiosity and passion for the local environment.

During this internship, I attended the week of training before the camps began where I familiarized myself with the property, Islandwood policies, and a variety of teaching techniques. At the end of that week, I was paired with the person who would be my co-instructor and mentor for the following five weeks of summer. I finished my internship by working the optional sixth week of summer camps, working with a different co-instructor for an opportunity to learn from my other coworkers. Through this time, I worked toward meeting the goals I had set for myself, including the specific learning intentions, capitalizing on the experiential opportunities I would not be able to get from a WWU classroom, and meeting the goals I set for myself specifically within the context of an Islandwood summer staff member.

### About the Organization

Islandwood is an organization located on Bainbridge Island, Washington, focused on equitable access to outdoor education and environmental science. They state on their *About US* page on their website, "we understand there is an inextricable connection between educational justice, environmental justice, and racial equity. Embedding justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) throughout our organization is central to our work in environmental education, and to inspiring healthy communities and a healthy planet" (Islandwood, 2021).

During the school year, they provide opportunities to schools around the region to offer outdoor education to their 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders through day trips and overnight programs. During the summer, Islandwood offers day camps for local students, pre-K to eighth grade, running from 9:00 am-3:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

### Learning Intentions

For this summer, I set myself three main objectives: 1) plan and teach a variety of program frameworks for outdoor environmental education for youth 2) Practice the concepts I

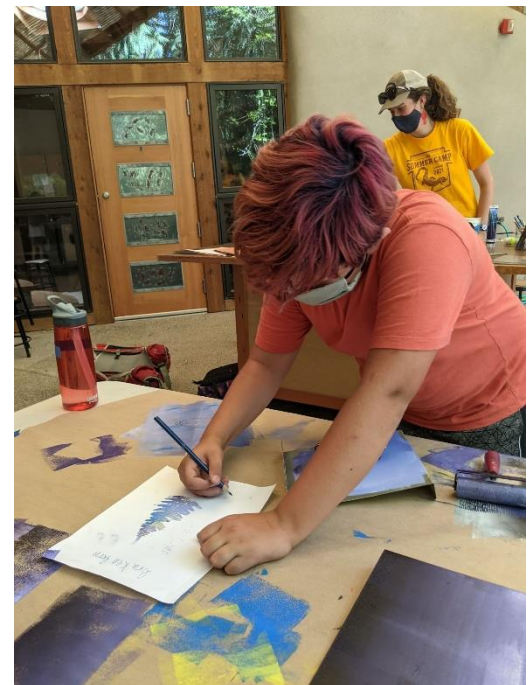


Figure 1 Student creating art print of native fern

learned at Western Washington University, including curriculum planning, cultural responsiveness, environmental communication, natural sciences, and environmental ethics, and 3) Practice communication skills with both my peers and my students. Throughout the seven weeks I worked at Islandwood, I engaged these objectives, meeting all three of my intentions for the summer.

### **Plan and teach Program Frame Works**

My co-lead and I worked together to write curriculums for all six camps we taught together. Through this experience, I was able to learn from my mentor a variety of ways to teach a day. I learned the importance of having a flow of pace, both at microscale and macroscale. In a day, there should be attention-getters, highly active activities, focused time, play, rest, pick-me-ups, and social space. All of these elements should be strung together to keep the students engaged and excited to be there. Balanced correctly, all of the activities should flow with the student's energy levels to they are involved through the whole day. The same is also true for creating a framework for the week at large, varying the days so we keep the students' interest.

Beyond the basics, I was able to explore several frames works for building a week of curriculum with my co-lead. We spent one whole week building an interactive narrative for our 1st and 2nd graders in our Claws Paws and Jaws week. Using stuffed animals, we spun a narrative around "Song Sparrow," describing to the students how she needed a nest, food, and other essentials, creating games and activities around each of her needs that the students did to learn about birds. We continued using the stuffed animal character throughout the week to teach them about predation and other relevant topics. By using characters throughout the week, we engaged our young students, creating a memorable story to attach our lessons to, teaching empathy and creative thinking as well as our fact-based lessons.

Another week, my students made a magazine. Each day I would have my students make one art piece and one creative writing piece. In this manner, I created a predictable routine for the week. This way the students knew what to expect from the rhythm of the day, even as I varied the activities and topics. I found this framework to be very helpful for the age group (5th and 6th graders) for hanging the rest of my content off of.

Throughout the seven weeks, I was able to practice multiple ways to structure the days and weeks, learning from my mentor as I went and refining my approach each time I taught.

### **Practice Learned Concepts**

At Islandwood, I was given ample opportunity to practice the skills and concepts I had been taught at WWU. In the winter quarter, 2021, I took ENVS 492, Curriculum of Environment, where I learned how to create a curriculum that is powered by liberated pedagogy, cultural

responsiveness, and student lead learning. I pulled greatly from my learnings from this class during my internship as I planned curriculums with my co-lead. Islandwood spent a day during our weeklong training specifically devoted to cultural responsiveness, and I combined this training with what I learned in ENVS 492. I paid attention to what I knew of my student's cultural backgrounds and made space for backgrounds I was not aware of. I built in many modes of learning throughout my days, including free play, creative writing activities, storytelling, partnered exploration, tactile experiences, book learning, and more. Through these different modes of learning, I made sure to provide peer-to-peer interactions, self-exploration, all direct teacher instruction, all of which angled toward providing each student with the opportunity to thrive in their preferred mode of learning and also engage in a variety of learning styles as well.

Through my teaching as well as candid conversations with students between activities, I kept in mind several of the lessons I learned in ENVS 491, Environmental Communications, the primary one being that shame-based teaching is not a long-term strategy. When I taught my students about environmental stewardship, being aware of their impact as well as general human impact on the environment, I stayed mindful to keep away from narratives that would condemn the students for poor action, ignorance, or low control over their effect on the world around them. In ENVS 491, I learned that narratives based on shame and guilt aimed to motivate people to a change in behavior can have a very quick and poignant effect on the



listener, but the behavior change is often short-lived, followed by resentment and a return to old patterns. I did not want my students to feel guilt over having an impact on their environment. I believe that humans are a part of the ecosystem and therefore have a constant impact on their environment. Instead of promoting guilt, I wanted to promote awareness in my students of themselves and help them learn how to choose what their impact is. I couched this philosophy in an ethic of care for the environment and their fellow humans.

I developed my philosophy around human's role in the environment through my readings in ENVS 303 and my conversations in ENVS 481, Intro to Environmental Education, as well as through spaces beyond WWU. In all the camps, but specifically with my Soils to Snack camp, I taught ethical care for the plants the wilds spaces we occupied. In Soil to Snack, my co-lead and I would teach the students how to forage a specific plant and then turn it into a snack. Leaning on my long-standing knowledge of the local plants of the area as well as what I had freshly learned in ECSI 330 the quarter before, I taught my students

*Figure 2 Students adding foraged plants to bread*

safe and delicious plants to harvest. I also employed the principles of the Honorable Harvest, as taught by Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweet Grass*, making sure I taught the background of the knowledge as I went, including Kimmerer's name and the Potawatomi nation. Specifically, I focused on not taking the first plant nor the last plant we see and being mindful of if the plant gave "permission" to be picked. An example of this would be purposefully not picking the tips to form the first Western Hemlock tree we found, then carefully examining the second to see if it had enough new growth to withstand being harvested, then pulling on the harvestable parts to see if they came away freely. If they did not, then that was an indicator that the plant did not "give permission," that it was not ready to be picked yet, and that we should try another piece to pick or move on to a new tree.

Through these foraging exercises, I taught my students empathy for the non-human life we interacted with, stewardship of the resources we harvested, and connection to the place they lived. I taught these principles to steward a long-lasting relationship that was not based on fear or guilt that could easily burn out, but in care and love that would be sustainable.

### **Communication with Students and Peers**

Before this internship, I had not interacted with children since I was a teenager, barely older than a child myself. Because of this, I was excited to learn how to teach my students in a way that was engaging and respectful.

This was also the first time I was

working within my chosen field, and I wanted to learn how to talk with my fellow teachers and help each other as we planned our respective camps.



*Figure 3 Students engaging in free play*

One of the biggest things I

learned from my mentor was attention

getters. An Attention-getter is a method to quickly gain the attention of your students so you can relay instructions, gather them into a group, or otherwise have all eyes on you. This was harder than I first thought it would be. I rapidly learned that I needed to have a lot of attention-getters up my sleeve at any given point because while you may have a specific one that is very effective at that moment if you use it too repetitively it will quickly lose its effectiveness. An effective way of communication was having a short phrase said in a rhythmic way that the students were expected to repeat. For instance, I would call "Backpack, backpack!" and the

students would repeat it, easily communicating that it was time to grab their bags without requiring me to repeat myself. I wrote down lists of different ways to get their attention, and often referred to them. The students would often get bored within after a day or two of a single phrase and I needed to have three or four attention getters to cycle through to keep them fresh and effective.

Once I had their attention, I had to know how to continue to communicate. Another major lesson from my internship was learning how to scaffold my lessons in such a way the students could follow. By the end of the summer, this was something I found myself to excel at. For example, in a lesson I taught on writing and “I am” poem, I first read allowed a poem I had written myself. I then asked the students what some of the elements were they heard me write about. After that, I then asked them to relate it to themselves. I encouraged every answer, even the ones I knew were meant to be facetious. A favorite teacher trick of mine was to not shoot down any idea meant to be flippant, but instead take the student at their word, talking them through how to use their idea within the context of what we were speaking about. I enjoyed doing this because it did not allow them to get away with haggling me while still showing them that I gave them respect and did not wish to dismiss any idea. It showed the students watching us as well that I would take any suggestion they gave, even if they thought it would not be “good enough” to share with the group. In this way, I aimed to boost my student’s confidence in themselves while building trust between us.

As for communication with my peers, I learned how to use the community of educators around me to help keep my teaching fresh and evolving. If I was stuck on a lesson, I could ask my peers for suggestions. I also often listened to their debriefs of their day, gaining ideas from them on activities I would like to try. Many of our students would come back week after week, and this meant that if I was having trouble with a student I could easily ask around and find a colleague that had taught them already and ask them for advice on how best to engage the student. I asked for feedback from my peers and gave it when I could. I left the internship with many new friends and people who I feel I can call on in the future for help in finding jobs, references, or advice.

## Experiential Opportunities

Beyond learning intentions, I held specific goals for myself around the experiential opportunities provided by this internship, including hands-on experience, engaging with a mentor/mentee-style relationship with my co-teacher, and networking within Islandwood staff.

### **Mentor**

Islandwood provides every intern with a mentor that they learn from and co-lead with throughout the summer. This was a key feature of my internship that helped me to grow much more than I would have on my own. At the beginning of the summer, my mentor sat down with



me to discuss my specific goals for the summer and to scaffold my learning to create the best chance for success. They were as such: Week one I would observe, support, and absorb as much learning from my mentor as possible. Week two I would choose a single activity to lead each day. The third week I would be active in our planning and help to guide the week. In the fourth week, I would take equal responsibility as my mentor as co-lead. In the fifth week, I would be the main lead, planning the whole course of the week and taking the bulk of responsibility for the camp.

At the end of each day, my mentor would debrief with me for 30 minutes about the day where we would discuss what went well and what we could change. I learned to take notes from these debriefs, and our reflections together were greatly impactful in solidifying the hands-on learning from the day.

Throughout the summer, my mentor would check in with me, making sure that I was achieving the goals we had set together, and discuss if I wanted to alter the pace of responsibility I was taking. If I had questions on how to structure an activity, how to deal with a student's behavior, or how to bulk up the small teacher skills I could ask my mentor and she would give me advice. She worked closely with me to make sure I reached my goals. On our final week together, when I took lead for the week, she made sure to encourage me to dictate how much she was involved, being just as hands-on or hands-off as I asked her to be, and ready to jump in if I asked her to.



*Figure 4 A student returning collected macroinvertebrates to pond*

### **Hands-On Experience**

As discussed above, my entire experience at Islandwood was hands-on. Beyond the skills and experiences, I have already mentioned, I found two big lessons I would not have gained by practicing each skill individually. One of these lessons was how to maintain my stamina for the day, the week, and the whole summer. I needed to maintain a welcoming and grounding presence for the students at all times. There were many times when I became frazzled and overwhelmed, and in those cases, my mentor and co-lead were very helpful in guiding me through how to deal with my fatigue and frustration so that I was able to continue to teach. Through the scaffolding of learning I had built for myself through the summer, I was able to reach my goal of leading an entire week of camp. This was an incredible experience to put to the test all I had learned in a hands-on manner.

The other lesson was to learn how to be flexible. With around seven groups running around the same space, there were occasional conflicts of schedule, no matter how careful our group planning system was. There were several times I needed to adapt a lesson to a new area because the space I had intended to use was filled by another camp. But beyond scheduling, I learned how to adapt to the wishes and reactions of my campers. We found that the fort building was a great hit for several of our camps, and there were multiple days that we nixed our afternoon plans because the students were so greatly enjoying building forts in the woods. This built social skills, creative engineering, imaginative play, and teamwork, so we often allowed an extended stay at the fort building site if the students expressed a desire to do so.

One particular time I had to adapt to my students' reactions was the week that I was the main lead for the camp. Islandwood has an agreement with the local cemetery to allow for respectful groups to visit the graveyard. I was taking my students there as a lesson on legacy and had planned for them to make gravestone rubbings with paper and crayons. But when I introduced the activity to my students, there was an immediate uproar from about half of them, strongly expressing how they found this to be disrespectful to the dead. I pivoted quickly, deciding to use this as a teaching moment. Acknowledge their feelings, I immediately told them that I would change the activity because I saw it made them upset. I then explained my perspective to them, explaining how I had chosen the activity because I saw it as a way to learn from the gravestones and carry on the memory of the people buried there. I went on to point out many people have different ways they want to respect their dead. Not just individuals, but different cultures, and how people tend to hold these ways of respect very dear. I asked them to name the emotions they felt when I suggested the activity they found disrespectful and then told them that it is common for people to be protective of their dead. I related this all to our previous conversation earlier in the day about the history of the graveyard, how it had been segregated by race and how the Squamish people had not even been allowed to bury their people there, even though they had been forced to stop their traditional cultural practices of honoring their dead.

In this example, I took a moment that could have been disastrous to the whole day and instead pivoted quickly, validating their emotions, asking them to see how I could think differently, respecting how they felt, and then broadening it to the wider conversation of the day. We did not do the planned gravestone rubbings, instead just visually looking for different attributes of the various stones.

This kind of hands-on experience was infinitely valuable to me. It allowed me to solidify skills that I already had and add a bunch of new skills I had not known that I needed. I learned to spread my wings during this internship and solidify my confidence in my ability to handle a variety of situations.

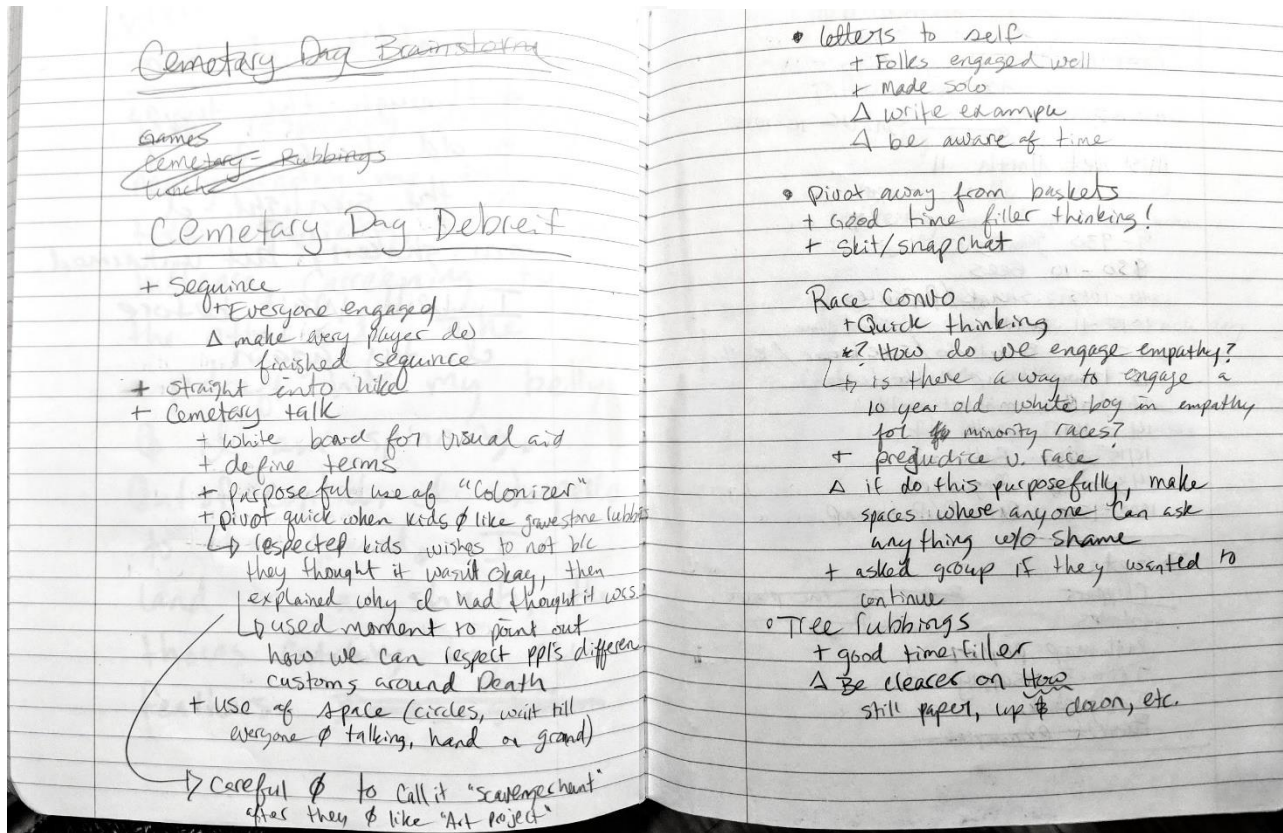


Figure 5 My notes from the day described above

## Networking

My last goal for this summer was to start networking within my chosen field. Via an intense and tight-knit nature of summer camps, I quickly became friends with all of my coworkers. We learned to rely on each other for support and ideas and often recreated together after the camp was done for the day. Through this, I got to know several people who have been working in the environmental education field for multiple years. I asked about my coworkers' experiences in their jobs and what organizations they had worked for. I was able to get a sense of what sort of jobs I might be working after college and what to prepare myself for. I asked about their experience with networking and learned that for the most part, everyone seems to be only two degrees removed from having a connection to most outdoor education organizations in the nation.

By the time I left Islandwood, I had several pieces of advice from more seasoned educators and four different offers for letters of recommendation, three from the camp coordinators and one from my mentor. I genuinely cherish the relationships I fostered during my time at Islandwood and greatly value the professional relationships I created during that time as well. I plan to maintain contact with everyone there and take advantage of the connections I now have to several different organizations around the country.

## Application of knowledge

My coursework and my experiential application work together have contributed greatly to my understanding of the creation and application of knowledge in environmental education. I hope to use my degree in EE to work at organizations just like Islandwood, where I can teach kids about the plants and animals in their backyards and foster in my students a sense of wonder and love for their home. During my internship, I was able to do just that. Using what I have learned at WWU, I combined my knowledge with what I was learning at Islandwood to create a camp experience that inspired my students and taught them about the natural world on Bainbridge Island.

Each day, I thought carefully not only about the goal of the lesson I had planned but also about the covert messaging that those lessons gave. I was purposeful in structuring my lessons around the environmental ethics and communication I had learned at the University. I learned how to translate large and complicated subjects into easily digestible activities tailored to the age group I was teaching so that the lessons would stick with them beyond the one week we had together.



*Figure 6 Students hike through big leaf maple grove*

My internship at Islandwood has set me up to succeed in my career as an environmental educator. I was able to practice taking the theoretical concepts from a classroom and put them into practical application for a variety of ages. I was able to practice networking with my peers to begin building a web of connections that will serve me for years to come. I practiced patience with myself, my peers, and my students, and learned how to push through the days when I did not feel inspired and remember why I want to do this work. The Islandwood summer program internship was a powerful contribution to my education and an experience I will continue to learn from as I finish my degree and enter into my career in environmental education.

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