

Unit 1. Reading 3

Name: Date:.....

Nature and Happiness

It's no secret that spending time in nature makes us feel relaxed. But have you ever wondered why?

By using new technology that can measure brain waves, scientists can now see that our brains react differently when we're in nature. They have found that when we are in a natural environment, a part of the brain—the frontal lobe—becomes more restful. Our stress levels, blood pressure, and heart rate also go down.

Researchers believe the reason we are more relaxed outdoors is because our senses are more active. When we're indoors, we may just be using one or two senses at a time. But when we're outdoors, we're seeing, smelling, hearing, and feeling the nature all around us.

In Japan, the concept of *shinrin yoku*, which means “forest bathing,” has been around since the 1980s. *Shinrin yoku* is based on the idea that our senses are more fully engaged when we're outdoors. The idea is simple: anyone can become calmer and even healthier by visiting a natural area and relaxing there. Researchers in Japan and South Korea have gathered evidence for a range of *shinrin yoku*'s health benefits, some of which are surprising. They have found that many trees give off chemicals that boost our immune system and that increase the number of cells in our body which fight cancer. Research also shows that *shinrin yoku* can result in an increase in overall long-term happiness, better sleep, and faster recovery from surgery or illness. It's now also a part of preventative healthcare and healing in Japanese medicine.

Florence Williams, author of *The Nature Fix*, believes that spending time in nature can make us happier, healthier, and more creative. In her book, she talks about the “nature pyramid.” “A little bit of nature is helpful; a little more nature is even more helpful,” she explains. At the bottom of the pyramid, house plants or a walk along tree-lined streets provide us with small daily doses of nature. Moving on up the pyramid, getting out of an urban environment and going to a park or the beach, for example, is recommended for at least one hour a week. At the top of the pyramid are occasional longer trips deep into nature.

Nature expert Tim Beatley points out that we should think of the pyramid like a menu—we can all choose how we get our regular dose of nature. Whether it's just a few minutes with some house plants or a longer trip to the countryside, people from any community can increase their well-being—just by taking a step outside.

Choose the correct answer for each item.

1. Researchers think that people are more relaxed when out in nature because they are _____.
 - A. using four of their senses
 - B. getting more exercise
 - C. breathing cleaner air
2. Some of the evidence gathered by Japanese and Korean scientists about the benefits of *shinrin yoku* is _____.
 - A. unexpected
 - B. uncertain
 - C. unwelcome
3. According to researchers, one benefit of *shinrin yoku* may come from _____.
 - A. fresh air
 - B. chemicals from trees
 - C. clean water
4. What is “preventative healthcare”? (paragraph 4)
 - A. emergency healthcare
 - B. steps taken to avoid getting sick
 - C. healthcare provided by medical experts
5. At the peak of the “nature pyramid” described in paragraph 5 would be _____.
 - A. smelling flowers in a florist shop
 - B. a day trip to a nearby farm
 - C. a week-long camping trip in the mountains
6. Which of these statements would Florence Williams probably agree with?
 - A. To benefit from contact with nature, people must spend long amounts of time there.
 - B. If one spends enough time in nature, other forms of medicine are unnecessary.
 - C. The more intense one’s experience in nature is, the more it helps that person.

Decide whether each of the following statements is TRUE, FALSE or NOT GIVEN according to the information from the text.

7. New technology has helped researchers understand how nature affects us.
8. *Shinrin yoku* can be practiced both indoors and outdoors.
9. A day out in a city park would be neither at the top nor at the bottom of the “nature pyramid.”
10. Tim Beatley worked closely with researchers in Japan and South Korea.