Ask Nature

What it is:
In this activity, you explore the strategies that nature uses to address a challenge that you are facing.

Why it works:
In nature you can find wildly creative solutions and strategies to address virtually any challenge you can imagine -- and likely many more than you could ever imagine!

Creativity is expanded when you include nature among your sources of inspiration and potential solution space.

Creativity is enhanced by feelings of playfulness, joy, curiosity, and daring.

Exploring nature releases our inherent biophilia, child-like curiosity, and sense of adventure.

How it works:
Choose a challenge.

Find a place in, or an inspiration from, nature. It can be outdoors, a zoo, nature books or websites, or simply a pinecone.

Ask how the pinecone (or other natural inspiration) might solve or address your challenge. What strategies are used? What other benefits emerge from these strategies?

This may seem preposterous at first and may provoke you to dig deeper into what your challenge is really about, and what you want the solution to really do.

Look for strategies based on combinations of materials, shapes, processes, and relationships, as well as whole systems.

Consider different scales, from nano to global. Consider how strategies adapt and change over time. Consider how nature performs the opposite function.

Then imagine how you might use one or more of these strategies to address your challenge.

Tips:
• Don’t worry getting the biology right. This only becomes important if you choose to develop a design based on biological strategies.

• This can work on non-technical as well as technical challenges (e.g. policies as well as products).

• Simply exploring functions can enhance creativity.

From the mini-course Using Biomimicry for Delivering the Good Life, a partnership between Sustainable Brands and MCAD

Master of Arts in Sustainable Design

mcad.edu/sustainable mcadsustainabledesign.com