

The importance of play

Stage 3 (Years 5-6) Lesson Plan

Children will explore the purpose and design of their school playground, discovering improvements that could be made to make them more inclusive.



What does UNICEF do?

UNICEF is the world's largest children's charity working to protect children, globally and here in Australia. We help children realise their full potential by providing access to clean water, lifesaving vaccines, quality education and health care. We ensure every child is safe and protected from harm and we're always there during times of emergency.

UNICEF and the importance of play

Play is an important part of children's learning and growth – it's how they explore their environment, practice developing skills and bond with the people around them.

Did you know play is actually a right? According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to rest, relax, play and take part in cultural and creative activities.

UNICEF champions the transformative power of play for children in Australia and overseas. Unfortunately, many children around the world lack access to play opportunities, particularly those affected by malnutrition or living in challenging circumstances. UNICEF works to address these challenges through initiatives like repurposing materials for play, promoting access to safe play spaces and advocating for every child to have the opportunity to play, as a fundamental right and crucial tool for learning, health and development.



Activity Overview

Students will explore the purpose and design of their school playground by conducting an audit using the structured worksheet provided. They will assess play zones for variety, safety, inclusiveness and usage. The goal is to identify improvements that support the right to play for **every child**, regardless of age or ability and to connect their voice to positive change in their school.

Mapped Curricula Outcomes in Appendix at the back.

Materials Needed



Digital Screen with internet connection to show video.

Brave Little Videos: Disability and Inclusion

https://youtu.be/Z7ZmPcSavjU?si=aJpc9iN_hu1wCDC8 (1:11 secs)

Watch what happens when parents join children to play

UNICEF <https://youtu.be/QDLcU02pSYo?si=Oesx43FZQS5vzcWE> (1:10 sec)

NOTE: Preview the video to ensure it's appropriate for your students.



Printed **Playground Audit Worksheets** (2 back-to-back pages per student, less if students' are working in pairs)



Clipboards or **hard surfaces** for writing



Pencils or **pens**



Coloured pencils or **markers** for sketching ideas



Whiteboard, blank wall, butchers paper



Optional

- Post-It notes
- School map
- Camera or iPad (to take photos of areas to support discussions)

Learning Intention

We are learning about the importance of play as a human right and how we can use our voice to improve our playground so that it is inclusive, safe and sustainable.

Success Criteria

I can:

- Explain why play is important for all children.
- Link play to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Identify strengths and areas for improvement in our school playground.
- Act as a Playground Detective to gather ideas for positive change.

Lesson Structure

Activity 1: What is play to you?

1a) Play Personality Quiz Warm-Up

Begin by introducing students to the idea that everyone has different “*play personalities*.”

Teacher prompt: “*There’s no right or wrong answer—play looks different for everyone. Let’s find out what makes play fun for you!*”

Ask questions like:

- *Do you love competition?*
- *Do you like to make things?*
- *Do you enjoy pretend and imagination?*
- *Do you like to explore outdoors?*
- *Do you like funny jokes and being silly?*

After each question, ask students to move to a labelled corner of the room or do a quick body movement (e.g., jump, spin, hands on head, or clap) to indicate their choice.

1b) As a class watch **Brave Little Videos: Disability and Inclusion**

https://youtu.be/Z7ZmPcSavjU?si=aJpc9iN_hu1wCDC8 (1:11 secs)

Ask:

- *What do you notice?*
- *How do the children’s play experience change?*
- *Are there places at our school where someone with a disability can play?*
- *Is there anything else you noticed?*

1c) Small Group Reflection: “What is play to you?”

In groups of 3–4, give students time to brainstorm, what play means to them. Students jot or draw their responses on paper or sticky notes.

Ask questions, such as:

- *What do you love doing when you play?*
- *How does play make you feel?*
- *Can play be learning too?*
- *What happens when you can’t play?*

Teaching Talking Point: “Play with Purpose”

“Did you know that play isn’t just something fun you do at lunch or after school—it’s actually a human right?”

The United Nations says in Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that all children have the right to **rest, relax and play**. That means no matter where you live, or who you are, you should have the chance to play safely and freely.

- As a class watch the video:

Watch what happens when parents join children to play UNICEF

<https://youtu.be/QDLcU02pSYo?si=Oesx43FZQS5vzcWE> (1:10 sec)

But not all children in the world get that chance. Some kids live in places without safe playgrounds. Some don't have time to play because they're working or caring for others. Some have disabilities and their playgrounds aren't inclusive.

That's where the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, come in. These are 17 global goals that world leaders agreed on to make the world fairer, healthier and more sustainable by 2030.

When we protect play, we're actually helping with some of these goals—like:

- *Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing – because play keeps our bodies and minds healthy.*
- *Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities – because inclusive play means everyone belongs.*
- *Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities – because we need safe, green spaces where children can play now and in the future."*

1d) Whole Class Visual Anchor

Create a "Play Is..." wall or chart or divide the whiteboard into columns, where students post/write their ideas.

Use sentence starters like:

"Play is..."

"Play makes me feel..."

"My favourite way to play is..."

Cluster student ideas under emerging themes (e.g. imagination, social connection, movement, creativity, laughter, exploration).

Imagination	Social Connection	Movement	Creativity	Laughter	Exploration	Other...

Activity 2: Playground Audit

Teacher Prompt: *Today we are going to **Audit** our school playground.*

Auditing a playground means carefully observing and assessing how well the space meets the needs of all students—making sure it is safe, inclusive, accessible and fun for everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or background. It involves looking at what works well and what could be improved to support every child’s right to play.

When you speak up about your playground or help make it safer or more fun for everyone—you’re not just playing. You’re helping build a better world.

- Hand out the audit worksheets (1 sheet printed back-to-back) and read through it with students.
- Students work in pairs or individuals to explore the school playground and complete:
 - Part 1: What’s in Our Playground?
 - Part 2: Zone Sketching
- Teachers circulate to guide students, prompt observations and check safety.

Activity 3: Reflect and Reimagine

Back in class, hand out the **Reflect and Improve** worksheets (1 sheet printed back-to-back) and read through it with students.

- Students complete:
 - Part 3: What Could Be Better
 - Part 4: My Big Ideas
- Prompt students to think of ways to improve **inclusion, variety, creativity** and **accessibility**.

Activity 4: Sharing Student Voice

- Invite students to share one improvement idea with the class.
- Optional: Record ideas on a class poster or chart titled **“Our Playground for All”**.
- Link ideas to the UNCRC and SDGs again:

“How does your idea help make play fairer, safer, or more fun for everyone?”

Assessment

- **Formative:** Observation of student participation during the audit.
- **Worksheet Review:** Completion and quality of audit worksheets show student understanding of play value, inclusion and improvement planning.
- **Discussion:** Quality of student reflections and suggestions during sharing time.

Follow-Up Activity: Build a Model / Pitch an Idea

Option 1: Design Challenge

- In small groups, students create mini models of their redesigned playground using recycled materials or Minecraft Education or Tinker Cad.
- Present to school leadership or Student Representative Council (SRC).

Option 2: Student Voice Letter

- Students write persuasive letters to the Principal or P&C outlining their top improvement suggestion, linked to the SDGs and the right to play.



More Teacher Resources and Lesson plans
are available on UNICEF Australia's website
unicef.org.au/teacher-resources

Appendix: Alignment to Curriculum

	NSW Curriculum	Australian Curriculum Version 9
Syllabus Area:	PDHPE (2024) Science and Technology (2024)	HPE, Design and Technologies,
Sub-topic:	• Identity, health and wellbeing • Design and digital technologies engineer sustainable solutions	• Personal, social and community health • Processes and production skills
Syllabus Outcomes / Content Descriptors:	A student PDHPE PH3-IHW-01 examines and explains factors that influence identity, health and wellbeing of individuals and groups. Science and Technology ST3-DDT-01 uses design processes to create, evaluate and modify designed solutions.	Year 5-6 students HPE AC9HP6P05 describe and implement strategies to value diversity in their communities. Design and Technologies AC9TDE6P01 investigate needs or opportunities for designing and the materials, components, tools, equipment and processes needed to create designed solutions. AC9TDE6P02 generate, iterate and communicate design ideas, decisions and processes using technical terms and graphical representation techniques, including using digital tools.

Links to General Capabilities:**1. Personal and Social Capability**

Self-awareness: Reflect on how play impacts their own wellbeing and development.

Social awareness: Recognise and respect the needs and perspectives of others in shared play spaces.

Collaboration: Work together to assess and redesign playgrounds that are inclusive and respectful.

2. Ethical Understanding

Understanding ethical concepts and issues: Consider fairness, inclusion and the rights of all children to play.

Exploring values, rights and responsibilities: Connect student voice and action to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the SDGs.

3. Critical and Creative Thinking

Inquiring – identifying, exploring and clarifying information:

Investigate and gather data during the audit process.

Generating ideas, possibilities and actions: Design solutions to improve playground inclusivity and sustainability.

4. Intercultural Understanding

Recognising culture and developing respect: Appreciate how play might look different across cultures and communities.

5. Literacy

Comprehending texts through listening, reading and viewing: Engage with stimulus materials (e.g. short film).

Creating texts: Document observations and present improvement ideas clearly and persuasively.

Student Work Sheet

Playground Audit Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Class: _____ School: _____

Investigating Our Playground

PART 1: What's in Our Playground?

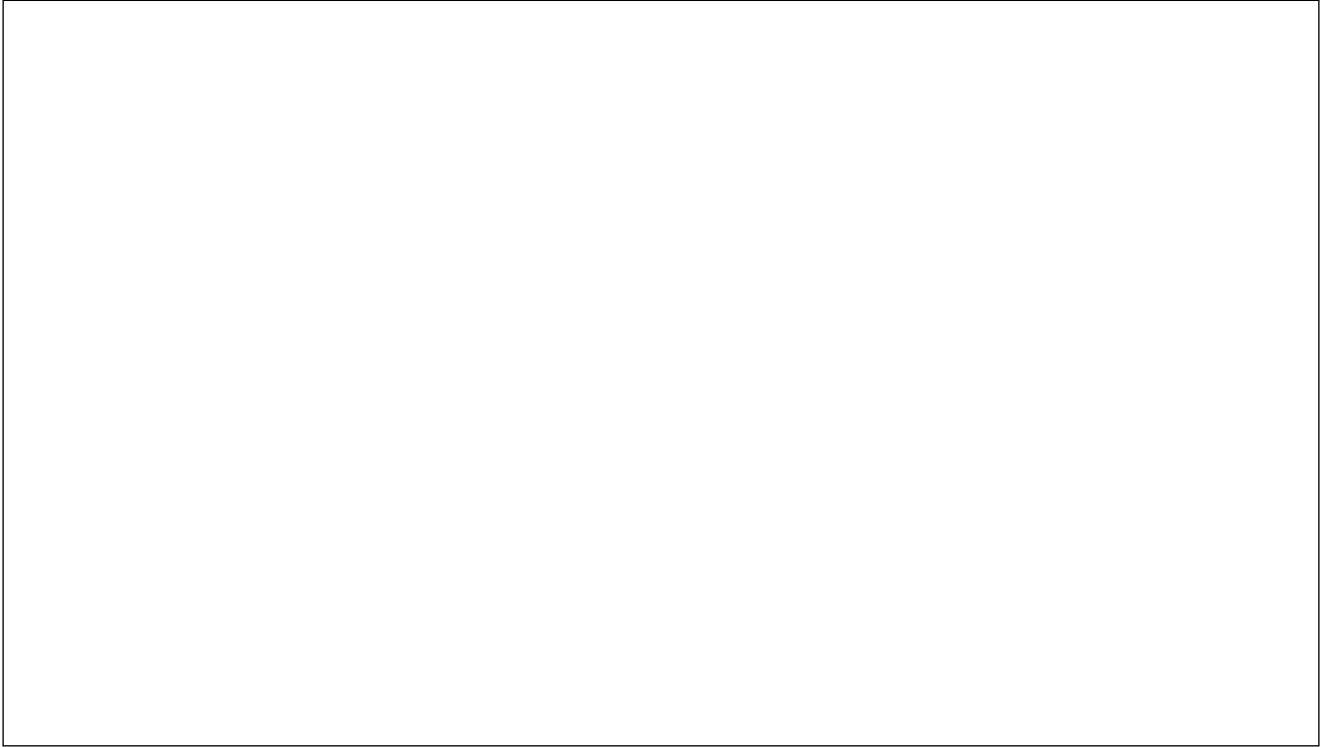
Walk around your school playground and complete the table below:

Type of Play	What's Available?	How Often is it Used?	Who Uses It?
Physical Play (climbing, running)		☐ Rare ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	☐ Infants ☐ Primary ☐ All
Creative Play (drawing, building)		☐ Rare ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	☐ Infants ☐ Primary ☐ All
Social Play (group games, chatting)		☐ Rare ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	☐ Infants ☐ Primary ☐ All
Nature Play (gardens, trees)		☐ Rare ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	☐ Infants ☐ Primary ☐ All
Quiet Zones (reading, relaxing)		☐ Rare ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	☐ Infants ☐ Primary ☐ All
Inclusive Play (accessible equipment or sensory spaces)		☐ Rare ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	☐ Infants ☐ Primary ☐ All

PART 2: Zone Sketching

Draw a **bird's-eye view** of your playground below. Label the different zones (e.g. equipment, grass, quiet areas, courts).

Use arrows to show where students mostly gather.



What Works Well?

Tick all that apply:

- ☐ There are many play options
- ☐ Students of all ages use the space
- ☐ The space feels safe
- ☐ There is room to be active
- ☐ There are quiet/creative areas
- ☐ Students with different needs can use the space

Write 2 things you love about your school playground:

1. _____
2. _____

Reflect and Improve.

PART 3: What Could Be Better?

Think about what could be **improved** for everyone to enjoy play. Answer these questions:

1. Are there places where students are left out or bored?

Where and why? _____

2. Is there anything broken, unsafe or unused?

What? _____

3. Can students with different abilities join in?

☐ Yes ☐ No — What's missing? _____

PART 4: My Big Ideas!

Use the space below to design or write about changes you'd like to make to the playground.

You can add new equipment, repaint spaces, create new zones, or add more inclusive options.

Draw or write your ideas here

Student Voice: Final Thought

What is one change you believe would make the biggest difference to play for everyone?
