

## **FIELD TRIP TEACHING HINTS**

*If you have any apprehensions about leading a group of children, relax! The following are several techniques you can use to help keep the group's attention and maintain the feeling of freedom and open exploration.*

### **Be Prepared**

For a more fulfilling experience come prepared by becoming familiar with the activity you will teach. The more comfortable you are, the more you and your students will be able to enjoy the activity. You may learn along with them. Before the field trip, practice presenting the activity to friends and family. If possible, visit the field trip site where you will be doing the activity.

### **Be Enthusiastic**

Be energetic and interested in what you are teaching and the students will be engaged and interested. Your own enthusiasm is contagious. Whatever you are doing, do it with gusto!! Get down on your hands and knees to look at the low-growing plants. As the leader you set the tone for the experience.

### **Focus Attention**

Students tend to exhibit more energy when outside. Make eye contact with individual students when conducting the activity. Call students by name and get up close to them to get their attention. Get students involved in activity. Use silence as a way of getting everyone quieted down. Be sure to find out the special signal used by the teacher to indicate silence. If disruptions arise get the teacher's help.

### **Keep Groups Small**

With all of the exciting discoveries that crop up everywhere in the field, it is hard to get everybody involved in groups of more than 10. Larger groups also have a negative impact on local flora and fauna.

### **Speak With the Group**

Talk with the group. Speak loudly and clearly, facing the group. You should be the one facing the sun and the wind, not the students. Allow the students' backs to be towards these elements. When you stop to look at something, before talking, gather the group around you with everyone facing toward the object of attention.

### **Manage the Noise Level**

The outdoors is a very exciting place. It is also one of the few places where people can shout. Sometimes you will want to insist on absolute quiet and listening, but understand that this can be overdone. The outdoors is one cathedral that can tolerate the buzz of excited voices.

### **Lead the Group on Trails**

When you are at the front of the line, you can set the group's pace as well as focus the group's attention. Have one of the adult helpers or responsible students stay with the slowest members of the group. This way you will know that everyone is somewhere between two places.

### **Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!**

Be the voice of the plants when students in their eagerness to get into the woods walk off the trails. Try and impart an ethic without negative words.

### **Acknowledge Respectful Behavior**

Encourage students to engage in cooperation by working together in caring and respect, by showing concern for others and the environment. Also by being accountable for their individual actions. Be sure to thank students whom you observe being respectful of nature and others.

### **Arouse Curiosity**

While they look, listen and discover what nature is doing around them listen to the students' questions and comments. Allow students to tell you what they see; every observation is valuable. If they come up with questions that you cannot answer have the students write them down. They may ask the question at the closing activity, ask the teacher, or look up the answer back at school or at home.

### **Reinforce Discovery**

When a child points out a spider, snake, caterpillar, or snail, this is the most important thing in the world to him or her. Respond with enthusiasm to this discovery and call the group together if possible to share what has been found. Hopefully your own discoveries will excite you; share it! *Enthusiasm is a bigger catalyst than knowing a bunch of names.*

### **Use the Teachable Moment**

As you walk down any trail in the outdoors, things are happening. A spider is eating a grasshopper or a hawk is hovering above the wet prairie. Sometimes these discoveries are made at "awkward" times in an activity. Try and adjust your teaching so that you capitalize on these special times. *BE SPONTANEOUS!*

### **Plan a Variety of Hands-on Activities**

A picture is worth a thousand words and an experience is worth a thousand pictures. The outdoors is a very "hands-on" medium. The opportunities for involving students in action activities are endless. As you plan your day, try and have an itinerary that includes sensory, scientific, artistic, dramatic, explorative, and just plain fun activities.

### **Use all Your Senses**

There is much more to the outdoors than meets the eye. Smell the duff of the forest floor, feel the wet, slimy skin of a slug, listen quietly to the sounds of a wet prairie at sunset, taste the tartness of a wild blackberry. We long remember things that our senses teach us. Open yourself up to all the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of our planet.

### **Use Tools to Aid in Discovery**

Magnifying lenses, binoculars, thermometers and other tools are very valuable things to have along in the field. They are hands-on things that can be used to focus attention on special discoveries. They are, however, not essential. The American Indian is an example of a top notch nature observer who had the best tools that anyone can have, namely one's eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and physical body.

### **Demonstrate**

Demonstrate an activity as you explain it. Follow the teaching format. Keep your explanations and vocabulary simple.

### **Encourage Participation by Asking Questions**

Whenever possible, ask questions instead of giving information; this encourages thinking and group interaction. For example, "Why is there a hole in the ground here?" "How did it get here?" "What would you need to live here if you were a \_\_\_\_\_?" Praise students for contributing to the discussion whether or not their comments or answers were correct.

### **Use Patience**

Students will appreciate and remember an answer better if they come up with the answer on their own. Make sure to allow time (at least 10 second count) for students to think about an answer to your question before giving the answer.

### **Keep Writing to a Minimum**

Writing and other activities that can just as easily take place in the classroom should be kept to a minimum. Scientists' notes, yes; reams of data sheets, no!

### **Label Last**

Often, once we know the name of something we turn off our attention, put it into its neat little box and search for something else to label. Names are good to know, but so is information on why something is what it is, why it does certain things and lives where it does.

### **Learn With Students**

Do not feel like you need to be a "walking encyclopedia" of facts to lead a good field trip. How you react to something speaks so loudly that often people cannot hear what you are saying. Be an enthusiastic facilitator rather than a boring lecturer. Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know, but let's find out."

### **Learn From Your Mistakes**

Be prepared to make mistakes. Learn from the things that did not work well and those that did and change your plan accordingly. After each rotation assess what happened with the group. Be open to what students can teach you.

### **Wrap-up the Activity With a Discussion**

At the end of an activity be sure to pull it all together with a summary question.

### **Dress Properly**

Teaching in the outdoors requires a great sensitivity to the effects of weather. Nothing can ruin a field trip faster than a group of cold, wet students. Raingear, hats, and gloves are essentials along with adequate footwear in rainy western Oregon. Wind, too, can be a problem. When talking to a group, talk downwind. Your body will act as a wind break and it will be easier for them to hear you. Keep your students interested and active and you will have fewer complaints about the weather. Instead of a list of clothing requirements make a study of exposure and hypothermia part of your preparation. Help your students learn how to take responsibility for their physical well-being by teaching them what their bodies require.

### **A Note About Hypothermia**

**HYPOTHERMIA:** means chilling of body resulting in a rapid and progressive mental and physical collapse. It is caused by exposure to cold. It is aggravated by wetness, wind, and exhaustion.

When planning short hikes and field trips, the following precautions should be taken.

**STAY DRY:** although wool is the best insulator when wet, all fabrics lose most of their insulating value when they get wet.

**AVOID WIND:** wind acts as a refrigerant on the skin and on wet clothing.

**WATCH** your students for shivering and evidences of physical and/or mental exhaustion.

If you cannot keep your students warm and dry, return to a shelter (the bus, a car, a restroom, etc.). Do not risk continued exposure. The more students you have under your supervision, the more cautious you need to be. When everyone in a large group gets cold and wet, it becomes difficult to watch each person carefully.

For outdoor activities where you are more than an hour or two from shelter, prepare yourself more carefully by consulting Four Lines of Defense Against Hypothermia, available from Motion Picture Consultants, Inc., N.E. 130<sup>th</sup> Ave., Seattle, Washington 98125, from which this information has been taken.

### **Refuel the Bodies**

Protein snacks such as nuts, sunflower seeds, or gorp go a long way towards sparking a group's energy level (especially when it's a surprise). Remember that before humans can contemplate ecological concepts, their primary needs must be met. Water also is invaluable on a field trip.

### **Have Fun!**

Relax and enjoy the students! Have a sense of humor about yourself. Spark their imaginations.