

Strategies for Outside Learning



Outside spaces provide tremendous learning opportunities, but can also present challenges that are very different from teaching in a classroom. This section includes things for a classroom teacher to think about both before and during the student's outside learning experience.

Setting yourself up for Success

Planning

- **Scout the Site:** Any safety issues? What will your student boundaries be if you are letting them wander? What are potential distractions for the students? When is recess happening and can you avoid that time period?
- Set aside time the day before and just before you head out to prepare the students for the experience. Which portions of your lesson need to happen outside? Are there things you could do in the classroom before or after the outside time?
- Create a detailed schedule that includes time for students to use bathrooms and to walk to the location.
- Check the weather report and make a contingency plan for inclement weather.
- If the field study requires finding specific organisms, consider having pictures or pre-collecting organisms to be sure to have some on hand.
- Divide students into groups that will work well together. Do you have any students that need a specific job to keep them focused?
- If you are leaving the school grounds, get permission and permission slips for a walking field trip.

Arranging for Support

- Arrange for at least one Chaperone to be with you outside (3-5 is better). If parents aren't available, can your principal, student teachers, or other school staff assist?
- If you have students with special needs will they need their own assistant?
- Assign a chaperone to bring up the rear of the group.
- Make sure the office knows where you will be

MATERIALS

- ☐ Whistle, megaphone or other noise maker
- ☐ Plastic sheet protectors for your notes
- ☐ Student Writing Surfaces (Clipboards or cardboard with binder clips)
- ☐ Teacher Writing Surface (Clipboard & a mini-white erase board)
- ☐ Extra pencils
- ☐ First Aid Kit
- ☐ Overhead sheets or sheet protectors can be clipped on top of student work to shed water on a drizzly day.
- ☐ Back up rain gear: Borrow items from your school's lost and found? Garbage bags with head and arm holes can also function as ponchos in a pinch.

Preparing the Students

Most students think outside means recess-time and all students find a lot more to distract them when outside. You can overcome this by setting up an expectation for learning and front loading as much as possible in the classroom before you head out.

1. Remind students the day before to bring rain gear and seasonally appropriate clothing.
2. Make clear students will be outside for learning, not recess. Some teachers leave the building through a “science door” that is different than the door students use for recess
3. Create and practice ground rules for going outside including an attention signal. A loud call-back is helpful amidst outside distractions.
4. Explain the outside plan in detail. Are there things you can practice inside?
5. If you anticipate distractions (like a recess or construction), prep the students to ignore them

Outside with the Students

During Talk Time

- Gather students in a circle for group sharing.
- Sit students down (if dry) to focus them on you.
- Review what you went over inside including expectations and what they will be doing.
- Put the sun in your eyes to keep it out of the student’s eyes.
- Establish student boundaries (trees, sidewalks, fences, and posts all make good edges).

Adapting to the situation

- **Animals** are exciting! Let student’s focus on them and then segue back to the lesson.
- **Weather’s** impact depends on the students, amount of rain, and temperature. Can the students keep going? Do they need temporary shelter? Are you going to need to reschedule?
- **Lawnmower** noise can be overwhelming: relocate temporarily or provide some open exploration time and then continue once it has moved away.

Adapting to the students

- High energy students might benefit from running to a location and back.
- Moving students might be focused by sitting down.
- Shade, shelter, and location can all be changed to meet student needs.

STUDENT BARRIERS

Student’s outside experiences vary, and concerns interfere with their involvement:

- Modeling your comfort and excitement helps!
- Students could sit on plastic squares or garbage bags.
- Avoiding muddy areas can help with shoes.
- Garden kneel pads are great if you want the students to kneel on the ground.
- Check the ground for moisture, mud, and animal scat before asking students to sit.
- Gloves, plastic spoons, and/or yogurt lids are helpful for those who are worried about touching things.