

Handouts and Supplemental Materials

TAKING STUDENTS OUTDOORS

In a world where children spend more and more time indoors “plugged in” to television, video games, and computers, teachers have the opportunity to help students experience nature and develop a greater appreciation for the natural world. While presented as optional, several lessons and extensions included in these materials are designed to be taught outdoors (in the schoolyard). Generally, these outdoor sessions are structured to involve short periods of time (10-30 minutes). For this reason, you may want to consider implementing this unit in early fall or late spring, when outdoor conditions are most favorable. No study of the natural environment or ecology is complete without experiencing nature firsthand.

10 Tips for Taking Students Outdoors

1. Visit the location you plan to take students in advance of the trip to make sure that it is appropriate for your activity and free of any hazards.
2. Make sure students (and adults!) dress appropriately for the weather conditions and are prepared for sudden changes.
3. Be familiar with any medical concerns (allergies to bee stings, etc.) of your students. Take along a first aid kit.
4. Recruit a parent volunteer or other adult to accompany the class outdoors, if possible.
5. Set a clear purpose for going outdoors and make sure all students are aware of what they will be doing. Model/demonstrate complicated procedures. Set time limits (5-15 minutes) for students to accomplish specific tasks.
6. Before going outdoors, clearly communicate to students what behavior is expected. For example, use indoor voices instead of yelling or walk instead of running.
7. Have a signal for getting everyone’s attention and for gathering together in one place. It may be helpful to have students practice this before going outdoors.
8. Set boundaries for students while outdoors. It may be helpful to clearly mark the boundaries with stakes or flagging, or to have students walk the boundaries in advance of the activity.
9. Allow time for students to be curious and explore the natural environment, even if it is only for a few minutes. Encourage a “sense of wonder” and curiosity for the natural world. Encourage students to observe carefully.
10. Encourage students to respect all living things. Agree in advance on procedures for collecting any living plant or animal. Consider taking a trash bag outside and having students spend a few minutes picking up litter (using safety precautions).