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Field Trips





Introduction

Opportunities for fun and educational field trips abound in the Champlain Valley. This section will offer some general advice on field trips, review some of my favorites and list some other possibilities.

Field trips can be a valuable part of your learning if you view the site as an integral part of your classroom experience. In order to maximize the field experience, remember **P.O.P.:**

- Pre-visit learning activities
- On-site learning
- Post-visit assessment

*Dear Students,
Welcome to the morning of the day of our first field trip! We are excited about the trip and all the things that you will see.
You will learn a lot today. Not just from what you hear, but what you see...and if the waves are really 1 1/2 feet on the lake, you will learn a lot from what you feel!
Try your best to take in all the information and the sights. Listen well, be careful and be kind. We look forward to hearing from everyone we meet today—
“What a wonderful group of kids!”*

*Have a great day,
Ms. D.*

A note like this can be on their desks when they arrive in the morning, as well as a copy of the schedule and their name tag.







PRE-VISIT LEARNING ACTIVITIES

It is important for your students to know what they will be doing (develop the schedule together, if possible) and what they will be expected to learn. Often this involves showing slides of the site, or maps of the area. If students will use a worksheet, scavenger hunt list, or guide while there, show this to them before they go. Develop clear expectations of what you want your students to get from the trip and what kind of behavior you expect. The more they know about the tasks and expected outcomes, the more they will be able to process information while at the site. They won't be spending time trying to figure out what's going on!

Field trips should not be a “test” of students' knowledge, but an opportunity for them to integrate what they know and develop a better understanding of the topic.

Examples:

If students visit Crown Point, they will need information about the chronology of the two forts. Share timelines, journal entries, maps and outlines of the fort. Discuss with them why forts were built in a star shape and why Crown Point was considered a good site for a fort. When students see the two sites and walk the span of the ramparts that frame Crown Point and look from its high point, up the stretch of the lake to the north and south, they will learn more about military strategy than you can ever teach them at school, and everything you do in the classroom will make sense!

When you spend time in class doing “Wetlands Metaphor” (see *Ecology*, p. 465), which lets students compare the qualities of a wetland to those of tangible objects, they will “get it” when you visit the wetland. They bounce on the springy ground and exclaim, it *is* like a sponge!





ON-SITE LEARNING

The three most important words of advice I can offer for a successful visit are plan, plan and plan. Plan it as you would a lesson, not an outing. I always plan our schedule down to the minute, especially for a long day. Figure travel time, eating time, gift shop time and snack breaks, as well as educational time. Once on site, you can adjust the schedule as needed.

Ask yourself, “What kind of learning experience can I design to connect the kids to their surroundings?” Find ways to get students into smaller groups and a more intimate learning circle. Think of ways to bring in parents and experts who can teach your children “on-site.”

Examples:

At the Shelburne Museum, my teammate and I—and one year, the guidance director and a student teacher—stayed at four different stations and taught small groups of kids while parents did an amazing job of getting kids from one site to the next. At my station, in the Colchester Lighthouse, students sat around me on the rug in one of the upstairs rooms and I read aloud from the book *LIFE IN THE COLCHESTER REEF LIGHTHOUSE* about the jobs of a lightkeeper. Students then completed a scavenger hunt of the lighthouse.

On a wetlands walk, we split the kids into two groups. Judy Elson from Shelburne Farms led half the kids through a “muck walk,” while a parent took the other half on a scavenger hunt.



Luckily for us, the Champlain Valley is full of qualified educators who will help design a successful visit. Always clarify with museum staff your needs and expectations. Scheduling a field trip involves more than telling a museum what time you will arrive; discuss with personnel what your students can learn at the site.



POST-VISIT ASSESSMENT

The day after you return from a field trip, devote a lot of time to acknowledging and processing what the kids have learned. In my experience, they sometimes aren't aware of all that they know until they are given a chance to express it. By stating what they have learned, students learn more. They can write what they liked best or what they learned, draw pictures, hold class discussions or make presentations. Bill Ladabouche writes a "listening quiz" of basic information learned on the trip for students to take when they return.

Sometimes the learning happens in their thank you notes! Students can write thank you notes or postcards to museum staff and chaperones. This is a letter a student wrote to Frank Lowenstein who, at the time, worked for the Lake Champlain Committee and took the class on a wild and wet walk into a part of the Sandbar Wildlife Refuge. One of the things he wanted to teach them was the pattern of vegetation created by changing water levels.

Dear Frank,

Thank you for giving us a tour of the Sandbar Wildlife Refuge. It was fun to walk in all that mud and water! I was fascinated about how you told us about how the wetlands was created how the trees are on higher ground and the water is on the lower ground. The pattern was neat how it went trees water trees water and so on. Please write back!

*Sincerely,
Austin Barber, Grade 5, Milton*

Permission to visit a wildlife refuge must be obtained from your local Fish and Wildlife office.

The field trips can often be the incentive for a larger writing assignment or a culminating project. It makes sense that the best time to work creatively with the material is when the images are fresh in students' minds. For example, because they see so many visual pictures of the past on our visit to Crown Point and the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, I use this time to launch our major writing project, "Trip Around Lake Champlain" (see *It's About Time*, p. 191).

Processing the trip is also important because you need to communicate the importance of the day and credit their work. The expression "what you give is what you get" is very true on field trips in terms of behavior, attentiveness and learning. I often have a note on students' desks when



