

CONNECTING EDUCATION & TRAVEL



Field trips may be perceived as a fun reward for students—not necessarily something fundamental to learning. As budgets have shrunk, so too have opportunities to take students to visit museums, parks, and other traditional field trip destinations.

Even so, a study conducted by EducationNext in 2011 on the effect of visits to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art by almost 11,000 students showed that students retained at a high rate the factual information from their tours, exhibited stronger critical thinking skills about art, and experienced a greater degree of historical empathy. These results were even more pronounced in low-income students. The study clearly illustrated the educational value of field trips to the museum.

Many educators make field trips a priority because they see the value in experiential learning, defined by Lenore Borzak (editor of *Field Study: A Sourcebook for Experiential Learning*) as a direct encounter with the phenomena being studied, rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something about it. A well-planned field trip has the potential to place students in the thick of an authentic learning experience.

GET READY

The Children’s Museum in Indianapolis emphasizes, “Even the best field trip venues can be tremendously enhanced by well-prepared adults. Adults can facilitate powerful interactions with and among the students, challenging them with thought-provoking questions and comments.”

Preparing students in advance of the

trip will help them appreciate what they’re observing. Alex Van Steen, who brings his fourth-graders to the Mt. Rainier Scenic Railway and Museum, notes, “There’s a lot that could go over their heads—it’s big, cool machinery—but they could understand so much more. It’s important to ‘front load’—to build up what they might learn or see.”

One of the best ways to prepare your students is to prepare yourself. Many museums offer teacher orientation programs that allow educators a pre-field trip opportunity to tour facilities, listen to guides’ presentations, and take in all a facility has to offer in a setting that allows for focus and time to reflect how that information will be best

incorporated into the classroom, before and after the field trip. If you know in advance that you're taking chaperones, bring them to the orientation. Even if they're not taking part in pre-trip classroom activities, they'll be more engaged with the content and more confident engaging with students about the subject matter if they've had a chance to get acquainted with the venue.

Once you're well-acquainted with your destination, it's time to prepare your students—which means much more than passing out permission slips. Prepping might mean different things to different teachers. Consider some of these tips to cover your bases.

GET ETIQUETTE

Each field trip offers an opportunity to teach students the proper etiquette for each unique venue. What's appropriate for the ballpark is not appropriate for the opera. Teaching students about standards for dress, how one shows appreciation (do you "whoop it up" or clap politely?), and, in general, how to observe the behavior of others in order to make educated decisions about what's proper behavior for yourself, can help students to feel self-assured when they are eventually faced with unfamiliar social settings.

GET FLIPPED

Whether you're visiting a museum, historic city, performance venue, or other site, there are a variety of techniques you might use to "flip" your classroom so students enter into the experience with some newly acquired prior knowledge. KWL is a great place to start. Begin a chart listing what students already KNOW about the topic, add WHAT else they're curious about (which they could research in advance and further investigate on the field trip), and report what they've LEARNED, both after doing some research and after the field trip.

GET FOCUSED

Sometimes venues can be overwhelming, making it hard to know how to take it all in. Especially with older students, it might be tempting to let them wander without agenda—and there's certainly a value to allowing students to browse what's most interesting to them. Other group leaders might take the opposite tack, creating a scavenger hunt through a museum that will ensure students see every last exhibit. Creating activities that provide a meaningful task for students to complete could provide the perfect balance. An art teacher might ask each student to choose a particular style or artist in advance of visiting an art museum, and use that focus for advance work and during the visit. Block off an hour of the visit for a specific task regarding that topic, leaving the remainder of the visit for guided tours and group activities. Afterward, perhaps each student could create a multimedia presentation for the rest of the class, based on their observations and research. 📷

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FIELD TRIP LEARNING STRATEGIES

PRESENT THE TRIP AS A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

Some schools have gone so far as to abandon the term "field trip" in favor of "learning expedition." The name matters: While students might expect to be entertained or just relax on a field trip, the phrase "learning expedition" has a sense of urgency to it. Students would expect to accomplish something important on an expedition—it sets the tone for important work.

POSE A PROBLEM

Posing a question with open-ended solutions could provide students with real-world problem-solving skills. Whether their challenge involves conducting research and posing a solution, building something hands-on, or creating a presentation about their recommendations, it provides students with the opportunity to apply both new and prior knowledge to a real-life situation.

SHARE STORIES

Using recording devices (if permitted by your destination), give students the task of telling the story of a particular experience from the field trip. Pre-trip research could be combined in a narrative based on the student's personal response to the experience. Public speaking, digital editing, and a variety of other skills will be added to their learning experience. Students could create a narrated photo story when they return from a field trip, to be shared with next year's group, their families, or other classes. Use storytelling as a means for students to document the problem-solving involved in meeting challenges that they were asked to take on during their "learning expedition."

FOSTER COMMUNITY

Encourage students to practice the art of conversation. The bus ride to any field trip can easily turn into a texting and gaming free-for-all, but it could also be the perfect place for an icebreaker or interview assignment.