



GUIDE TO OUTDOOR LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

TEACHING OUTSIDE AT YOUR SCHOOL

Establish routines for your outdoor classroom and practice them for one or more class sessions before doing an outdoor lesson. These include establishing and learning about:

- your specific **gathering space** outdoors, which you can refer to as your “outdoor classroom”
- forming a **circle** upon arriving at your outdoor classroom (similar to taking your seat in an indoor classroom)
- **walking** together to the outdoor classroom (in the same way students walk in the halls)
- using a lower **voice volume** than at recess (e.g. “outdoor learning voices”)
- **starting and ending** an outdoor session with specific routines
- how to carry **materials** to and from the outdoor classroom
- **boundaries** outdoors

Be safe by planning ahead. We recommend:

- establishing clear, consistent **boundaries**
- students must be able to **see the teacher** at all times
- teaching students **not to touch any trash or litter** (without permission)
- selecting areas **free from cars/traffic**
- teaching students how to identify and **avoid poison ivy, stinging nettle, and thorns**
- teaching students how to respond to an **off-leash dog**
- not going outside in hazardous **weather** conditions
- doing a **tick check** after outdoor activities (when relevant)
- bringing your **outdoor pack** ...

Create an outdoor pack and bring it each time you go outside. We recommend:

- first aid kit
- charged phone
- tissues and hand sanitizer
- trash bag and gloves
- basic field guides
- extra paper and pencils
- extra hand lenses

A few **materials** can take you a long way. We suggest:

- journal/notebook and pencil
- hand lens
- a “sit-upon” – easy-to-DIY waterproof, cushioned pad for sitting on the ground (lots of ideas online for making these for free or next to nothing)



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FIELD TRIPS: PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NATURE-BASED OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

Knowing these **outdoor learning routines** will help students have a fun, safe, and productive outdoor field trip. Practicing these before the day of your trip will let your students know what to expect and set them up for success.

- **Walking in a single-file line or in pairs**
We've found that this is the easiest and safest way to move around the preserve, which has some narrow trails and steep sections.
- **Using a pre-designated line order**
This helps students focus on the field trip instead of on who gets to be first in line.
- **Forming a circle**
At each station, we typically circle up for orientation and instructions, and then again for discussion. When students know how to easily get into a circle, we save time and energy and can get right to exploring and having fun.
- **Turn and talk**
Students learn best when they have the chance to share ideas with their peers as well as the instructor. Students who have a chance to practice "turn and talk" before the field trip benefit from richer science discussions during their time here with us.
- **Word / signal for focusing attention**
We love to engage students in a mix of exploration and discussion, which means we often go back and forth between active exploration and quiet listening/sharing many times during the trip. Having a special word or signal that signals that transition is a great way to enable students to benefit from both exploration and sharing ideas with the group. Come up with a word or signal of your own and share it with us when you arrive!

Let students know **what to expect** on their field trip. This will enable them to prepare their clothing, materials, food, and water so they can have a great experience. Please let us know if you have questions beyond what is covered below.

- **Food:** Most schools plan to have lunch at Riverbend. On those field trips, lunch happens about halfway through the program. Students eat outside at picnic tables with their class. We ask that everyone pack out any trash or recycling.
- **Water:** While we do have water fountains, we recommend that students bring a refillable water bottle with them to make sure they have enough water to drink while they are here, especially on warm days.
- **Backpacks:** Students are welcome to wear light backpacks or string bags during the field trip so they can carry materials and a water bottle.
- **Restrooms:** We have 2 single-user bathrooms in our barn that students can use during the lunch break (and at other times for emergencies). We recommend that everyone use the restroom at school before boarding the bus if possible.
- **Clothing:** Most of the field trip is outdoors, so dressing for the weather ensures the best possible experience. Many field trips involve a stream visit, so wearing rain boots and/or bringing a backup pair of socks and shoes on the bus will help keep feet warm and dry.