

Day 5 - Teachers Notes 1

Hints for Organising a Todd River Field Study

A field study can be coordinated in a number of ways - from taking one day to simply explore a local wetland to conducting an intensive, yearlong 'stewardship' project. Taking your students out in the field, even for just one class period, is valuable since it provides a concrete frame of reference for the information taught in the classroom. "Mucking about" gets students excited and interested in the things they see, hear, feel, and smell. It engages them in the subject to be studied while they have fun in the process. Ideally students should be able to visit their study site at least twice - first as an introduction to the topic before any classroom instruction and again in the middle of the study to reinforce concepts taught in class.


Examples of how to organise your field study:

- Tales of the Todd lends itself to a number of disciplines - history, social studies, language arts, maths, art and science. Investigate the wetland through history - how has the use of the river changed over time? Can students chart the succession of plants and animals in this area? Have students document their observations of wetland characteristics through writing, art and photography. Maths skills are used for such things as mapping and water quality.
- The entire class might investigate one or two aspects of a wetland, such as studying birds. A census of bird populations could be passed onto Parks and Wildlife. Students might organise a cleanup or restoration of a wetland that has served as a dumping ground for household rubbish or other debris.
- Individual or small group projects are a natural extension of larger projects. Students can be organised into teams to study one specific aspect of the river system - water quality, soils, plants, wildlife - and report their findings to the rest of the class. Within each team, students can take on certain roles - a recorder, equipment specialist or surveyor (see field activity sheets for ideas).
- Field activities may take the form of environmental monitoring or stewardship projects. Students may collect data that are helpful to the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment (Parks and Wildlife, Waterwatch etc).

Some techniques to try:

Have students ask as many questions as they can think of. As they walk through the area ask students to think aloud, forming their observations into questions. Eg Why does this plant or animal inhabit this area? Why / when does water gather here? Who benefits from it? What happens when there is a flood?

Record the student's questions. Take the list back to the classroom. Either you or your students can sort and categorise the questions to focus your study.



You may want to approach the field study as a way to prove that a particular area is in fact a wetland. Have students collect information on water, plants and soils that will prove this.

Pre-planning Checklist

Once you've selected your field study site (choose from the list provided or select your own), check details eg is it still OK to access this area, do I know exactly how to get there, have I thought about minimising the environmental impact of taking a class there etc.

Obtain permission - from the school and from parents.

Take plenty of chaperones. In general one adult should be able to manage two groups of 4-5 middle school students at a time. Allow more adults for younger students.

Urge students to wear appropriate clothing - long sleeved shirts, long pants, strong shoes etc are best.

You may want to request a local expert to assist you in making observations during the field trip, including evaluating the health of the area. Someone with extensive field experience can point out features that might otherwise be missed.

Perform an Observation Exercise (see sheet) in class before heading out to the field to heighten the students' awareness of good observation skills in field work.

Obtain sets of field guides and other useful equipment eg first aid kit, camera, clip boards, data sheets, pencils, holding buckets, bug collection containers, a ball of string, wooden stakes, flagging tape, marking pens, a shovel or auger, baking tray, fish nets, binoculars, rubber boots (if needed).

Negotiate a 'Code of Conduct' before you leave the school

Eg

- Carry in, carry out! (Leave nothing but footprints behind)
- Collect only small samples of plants and only if there is plenty
- Handle all aquatic organisms gently and with wet hands, always putting them back where they were originally found
- Be careful to avoid disturbing wildlife, especially if nesting
- Keep noise and movement to a minimum
- Do not eat or taste anything
- Avoid getting excessively wet or dirty yourself, and don't cause others to get wet or dirty either