

Using the Outdoor Classroom

March, 23, 2019



Tips for Teaching Outside:

- **Dress for success.** Remind students to wear appropriate clothes for the experience. It can be helpful to keep a classroom set of sunscreen, hats and water bottles; essential items for even 15-30 minutes outdoors.
- **Review expectations inside.** Go over behavioral expectations and learning expectations inside so students know what is expected of them before it is too exciting to listen.
- **Choose and practice call and response.** Choose a simple phrase you can yell loud and clear that means 'come to attention'. This is useful when you need to stop and do a head-count or give instruction mid-activity.
- **Bathrooms.** Like a long bus ride, go before you go. Outline bathroom conditions at the site you are going to so students know what to expect.
- **Be the most uncomfortable.** Put yourself in the sunniest, windiest, wettest spot so that students can focus on you, not their discomfort. It's hard to pay attention with sun directly in your face!
- **Be seen and heard.** Find space big enough for the whole group to stand or sit in a circle or use a hill as a natural amphitheater. Keep in mind, comfort trumps perfect group space.
- **Set clear spatial boundaries.** Verbalize visible boundaries for students during activities, choose an area you are comfortable yelling or moving across quickly.
- **Acknowledge emotional needs.** Many people are not comfortable outside for a number of personal reasons, value and respect both the positive and negative responses to being outside.
- **Transfer and Debrief.** Help students apply the skills or knowledge they learned in the classroom to the outdoor activity. Debrief and reflect on the experience to strengthen connections.
- **Be Safe.** Carry a first-aid kit, be aware of allergies and symptoms of heat (or cold) fatigue and illness. Never approach or touch wildlife you are unsure of.
- **Be Courteous.** "Leave nothing but footprints and take nothing but memories" Handle plants and animals respectfully. Clean up any trash and gently replace displaced rocks or vegetation. Return wildlife back to it's home (a few feet for a person might seem like miles to small animals).

Also check out these resources:

City Nature Challenge: <http://citynaturechallenge.org/education-toolkit/>

California Native Plants Society: <https://www.cnps.org/education/students/parents-teachers>

Project Learning Tree: <https://www.plt.org/resources/educator-tips/teaching-outdoors/>

