

## Tips and Tricks for the Outdoor Classroom

### 1. Be prepared

- a. Get to know your schoolyard before the walk
- b. Identify harmful plants and animals
- c. Gather all materials needed

### 2. Know the objectives for going out and communicate these to the students

### 3. Establish groundrules

- a. Set firm rules for behavior
- b. Ask children to think and act like young scientists. *What would that look like?* (observant, patient, focused)
- c. Remind them they are outside to explore and discover, not for recess and play.
- d. Learning looks different in the outdoor classroom, expect that voices will be louder and excitement higher
- e. Model outdoor skills: observations, note taking and sketching, enthusiasm
- f. Make a rule of careful stepping -leave only footprints
- g. Set boundaries for exploratory activities
- h. Establish procedures for collecting and returning the tools

### 4. Strategies for getting attention

- a. Ask the teacher what works for their particular class
- b. Use attention "Grabbers"-
  - i. Engage in a calming activity - listen with eyes closed and ears cupped
  - ii. Hold up an object that is startlingly unusual
- c. Body language
  - i. "Circle up" the group when it's time to talk
  - ii. Sit down at the same level as the group
  - iii. Lower your voice to a whisper
  - iv. Stop and point or freeze and put your hand up
  - v. Use an unusual sound for getting their attention -hand clapping, hoot like an owl, whistle, bell
- d. Assign concrete tasks
  - i. Collect or look for specific items
  - ii. Sketch observations
  - iii. Complete a recording sheet (if applicable)
- e. Group control
  - i. Play follow the leader - baby ducks following the mother duck, coyotes traveling in the tracks of the leader
  - ii. When you first go out, remind students that you are in the lead. Let them know you are looking to see if someone looks ready to take the

lead, they may get a turn in the lead (behind or with you)

Compliment students when you see them "thinking and acting like young scientists"

- iii. When moving from place to place, identify your next stopping point and remind them you will go there together
- iv. Use "ambulators" (activities that students can do while they are on the move). For example, "*Count the number of different colors or sounds you observe between here and there*"
- v. Allow opportunities to release pent up energy - pretending you're a bird and flying to another tree, hop like a rabbit
- vi. Put your hand on the shoulder of the eager to speak child to let them know that their turn is next

### **5. Things to Remember**

- a. Wonder out loud and ask the students rich questions
- b. Don't worry about covering everything in the walk, be flexible and seize the teachable moments
- c. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know" and record questions
- d. Encourage research and future exploration after the walk