

GETTING YOUR CLASS INTO THE WORLD: TIPS FOR FIELD TRIPS

A number of things need to be taken care of before you leave for a field trip. Here is a list of ideas to start with (you should be able to answer “yes” to all these questions):

- Do you have all of your permission slips?
- Have you organized the transportation to and from the site? (If you’re using a private bus company, be sure to contact them the day before the trip to confirm.)
- Did you contact the site administrator (by email if you can, so you have a record of the confirmation) to confirm your arrival?
- If needed, do you have snacks for your students?
- Is there a place where your class can eat lunch?
- Will water be available, or do students need to bring their own?
- If it’s going to be a longer trip, do your students have materials to keep themselves occupied, like books or journals and a pencil?
- Do you have a copy of the class roster with each student’s family and emergency contact information?
- Do you have extra supplies like pencils and tissues?
- Do you know what first-aid you are allowed to bring or administer?

Get through this list at least the day before you depart to leave yourself room to make last-minute changes or get things done!

Plan for the Season

When planning a field trip, be sure to think about the season. If you live in a cold climate, you might want to plan a number of indoor trips for the winter months. If the climate in your area changes a lot with the seasons, different class excursions offer different educational value depending

upon when you go. For example, a nature center might provide fewer teaching moments for your curriculum about leaves if you go midwinter in a cold climate than if you go in the fall or spring. I take my class to a local park to do community service cleanup. When we go in the winter, there's less to do, but in the fall and spring, it's nonstop participation.

I had carefully planned a field trip to the zoo in springtime for my first-grade class. We were close to finishing our unit studying animals, and this was going to be a culminating experience. When we arrived at the zoo I realized I had made a mistake. I forgot what animals do in the spring—mate. As we were watching two chimpanzees mate, one of my students looked at me and said, “Mr. K, it seems like they like each other.” Next year we went to the zoo in the fall.

Traveling with Your Class

A number of years ago I saw a TV commercial for a bank. It showed a young, smartly dressed teacher in a deserted natural history museum walking her class past the skeleton of a dinosaur. All the students were holding hands, following one after another, looking like they were practicing for the ballet. That is a far cry from reality. More likely, you'll be plowing your way down a crowded street, trying to pull your class through a hectic entranceway, or organizing them on a school bus. With 20 to 30 kids, that can be a handful. However, a few tricks can make traveling with your class easier.

- **Choose one line or two.** One line can be long, depending upon your class size, but your students might tend to focus more on walking. In two lines, they walk with a partner and the line is shorter, though they might get distracted by chatting or fighting with each other.
- **Know where the restrooms are.** Whether you're traveling across the school yard or across town, always know where the restrooms are en route—or if there aren't any at all, plan ahead. You don't

want to be stuck with a kid jumping up and down, about to pee his pants, when you're 10 minutes from any toilet.

- **Assign jobs to students.** Give kids the roles of line leaders and back-of-the-line leaders (who make sure everyone is walking together and no one has fallen off the pace of the class) when you walk as a class. They will help you keep the line organized and keep your class walking together.
- **Monitor the line.** It's a myth that the teacher must walk in front of the line. When she does, she cannot see that four kids in the back of the line are dragging 100 yards behind, two kids are fighting, and

one stopped to tie her shoe, which can take a while for some. When the teacher arrives at her destination with her class, she is surprised that only half the class is there. Instead, stroll up and down the line, watching your class walk, making sure everyone is staying together, and helping anyone with untied shoes, spilled lunch boxes, broken umbrellas, and the like. You can talk to students and monitor your class instead of being stuck at the front of the line, trying to walk backward and yelling at the kids in the back of the line to hurry up. If you have parents helping on the trip, you can have them help you monitor the line, too.

BTW: Choosing partners can be a difficult process. If you let students pick their own buddies, they feel a sense of independence but feelings can be hurt. Mixing up genders and friends is a natural way to integrate your class on a field trip. Once you assign partners, make them stay together. If you allow some kids to make changes, no one will listen to you the next time around.

- **Plan to stop.** Pick periodic destinations along your traveling route, such as exit signs, stop signs, stores, or telephone poles, and direct the class to stop there. When the front of the line stops and everyone is together, pick the next destination: "Please walk ahead four parking meters and stop."

- **Count them.** Keep counting your class as you travel. Walk up and down the line to be sure everyone is there. If your class is walking in pairs, it's that much easier because you can count your class by twos.

It may sound silly, but safe, efficient line-walking takes a lot of practice, and no location is better to work out the kinks of the system than the hallway or grounds of your school. Walk up and down the hallway, using stopping points like fire extinguishers, drinking fountains, and classroom doors. Before you go on a field trip, whether it's a daylong trip or a walk around the neighborhood, be sure you have complete control of your class. You don't want to run into unforeseen problems (oh, they'll come up, don't worry) when you're in public. Try to have everything under as much manageable control as you can.

