

# ENRICHING STUDENTS THROUGH FIELD TRIPS

by  
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Children have a wonderful sense of curiosity about the unknown. Excursions into the community, museum visits, nature studies in a nearby park or an activity as simple as a walk in the neighborhood can extend this natural curiosity and stimulate children's interest in learning. As a teacher, you may have thought how wonderful it would be to take your students to such places as the Smithsonian, Yellowstone, or the San Diego Zoo. While these attractions are probably outside your reach, there are literally hundreds of places you can take your students right here in Iowa--your local laboratory.

Field trips do not have to be elaborate. A simple walk around the neighborhood can provide children the opportunity to experience those things which are impossible to present within the confines of the classroom. A neighborhood excursion can sharpen children's powers of observation. A walk down main street looking at buildings and noting decades of change can be a real eye opener. While observing leaves on various trees, don't forget to point out the landmarks which you may encounter along the way. Take time to discuss new construction going up and talk about objects or events as students encounter them. Every region of our state is full of history and interesting people. Modern wonders are just waiting to be discovered. Developing an awareness of Iowa and the local environment must start when children are young if they are to grow into adults who appreciate their neighborhood, community and state.

Field trips can be used to extend the impact of the expanding horizons curriculum model around which most elementary social studies programs are built. When students enter kindergarten, one of their first experiences is a field trip around the school building. By using such landmarks as drinking fountains, display cases, and other objects, they quickly learn to navigate throughout the building.

First graders will be pros at getting around the building and as a result, they will probably notice changes within the school family. Which classes switched rooms this year? What is new in the playground area? Help them to extend this natural curiosity by observing the houses across the street. How are the houses alike? How are they different? Some students will be such good observers that they will be able to share which ones give the best Halloween treats, which houses decorate for the holidays, which ones mow their yards or which ones mow and rake. They will also tell you the types of yard ornaments each home has. Local excursions such as this provide opportunities for you to teach higher order thinking skills such as comparing, contrasting, observing and classifying using the local environment.

In second grade children typically study neighborhoods. Exploratory trips around the neighborhood during the various seasons can present rich opportunities for learning. Many second grade classes also study about the first lowans, Native American Indians. Take your class to local areas where Indians lived. Nearly every community has people who collect Indian artifacts. Invite them into the classroom or better yet, go visit them. For more help, contact your local library or historical society. The senior citizen center is another resource for local historical information which should not be overlooked. Many senior citizens enjoy talking about "the good old days." By doing these kinds of activities you are establishing a knowledge base, you are helping children sharpen their powers of observation, and you are allowing them to make inferences about the information they have gathered.

Third grade students typically study the community. While there are many directions children could go in investigating the community, why not start with the name of the school? Was it named after the town or a combination of several towns? For example, with Winfield-Mt. Union, Winfield was taken from Winfield Scott who was a general at the time our town was incorporated. Mt. Union was another community that was brought into the school district. Students could investigate why this occurred. What happened to the Mt. Union school? What has happened to the town?

The study of the community could also lead to an investigation of ethnic groups. This may lead to additional field trips. In every corner of the state, there are members of ethnic groups who are willing to speak with children about their special heritage.

Fourth graders usually focus on geography in social studies. While there is great geographic diversity within the borders of our state, most of Iowa's land is devoted to agriculture. Helping students become aware of our great agricultural heritage is a logical point of departure for a number of field trips into the community and surrounding areas. Many towns have historical museums which contain excellent displays related to Iowa agriculture. But a visit to a local implement dealer to see and hear about modern machinery would yield much opportunity for teaching about Iowa's rich agricultural heritage.

In fifth and sixth grade students are ready for longer and more detailed experiences in the community. Through the use of Phase III monies, my district has funded supplemental summer school enrichment programs for upper elementary and junior high students. Over the past three summers, another teacher and I have offered numerous full-day historically-oriented field trips in the county and surrounding areas of the state.

In preparing for the field trips, we start by planning thoroughly. We adjust the length of the trip to the age and interest level of the students. We set the routes so that we never cover the same territory throughout the day's itinerary. We scout the territory to be visited for information if we are not familiar with it.

Before leaving each day, we give the students an oral pretest over what we will see and then repeat the test on the way home. This not only gives them an idea of what they will be experiencing but helps them attend to details throughout the day.

We frequently take our students to a cemetery. Cemeteries provide a wealth of learning for children if they are guided into the right kinds of experiences and observation techniques. I always discuss proper respect for a cemetery with students before taking them on a visit. We discuss all aspects of the issue while looking at names, dates, and types of carvings.

Another source of learning in the area are the bed and breakfasts. We visit the Mason House in Bentonsport, and students are in awe at the amount of history which is at their fingertips. They love seeing the rooms and the unique architecture in the surrounding area. They have even been known to say it would be nice to stay there--even without an arcade.

While each field trip has a particular focus, there are a number of incidental experiences which local field trips can offer students. For instance on one of our trips we stopped at a private home to visit a cave which is entered through the kitchen of the home! Historical markers are another source of incidental learning. Instead of driving right on by, we stop, read whatever information is available and discuss the importance of the marker to the local area. In larger towns we always visit a mall. This can become an elementary lesson on economics. In one mall of 120 stores, students recently observed that eighteen had closed in a six month period. We also try to find out what the rent is per square foot and do a little mental math. It is very interesting to hear students discuss why some malls are making it and others are not.

Field trips--are they worth it? YES a hundred times over. Frequently I hear parents ask, "When are you going to offer an adult class?" or "The other day we were driving to a nearby town and my child told me about..." Teach the children and parents will learn from them that IOWA is truly a place to grow!!!

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