

Planning a Field Trip on Architecture

Pre-Trip Activities:

Introduce the Field Trip Subject

An important component of pre-trip activities is to prepare students for their field trip in terms of its subject matter. These activities promote a sense of inquiry and purpose toward the field trip, and enable students to make clear connections between what they are studying in the classroom and their field trip experiences.

How you do this depends on your own training and teaching style, the resources available to you, and how the field trip fits into your plan of study for the topic. The important thing to keep in mind is that pre-trip activities, as well as activities to be done during and after the field trip, are all components of an integrated set of learning experiences, and need to be planned as such.

Reading materials, audiovisual aids, arts and crafts activities, demonstrations, experiments, class discussions, role-playing, dramatic performances, music, writing activities, worksheets, bulletin boards, learning centers, question boxes, and so on, as well as the site-based activities, are all useful for teaching subject matter. A few additional suggestions are described below.

1. Vocabulary

Make a list of unfamiliar words that relate to the subject of the field trip. Practice their pronunciation and spelling, and ask students to tell what they think they mean. Write down their ideas, then assign them the task of finding out the real meanings on the field trip. Afterwards go over their earlier definitions to see which ones were closest, most different, funniest, and so on.

2. Experience Chart

Construct an experience chart with young children on what they already know about architecture and architectural heritage, what they think might be true or what they've heard. (To construct an experience chart, write down children's thoughts in complete sentences on a large piece of heavy paper, using a marking pen. Read the sentence back to them to help them make connections between the spoken and written language. You may also wish to post the charts around the room for the children to reference.) Also make a list of things they would like to find out and take it along on the field trip. After the trip go over the chart to make additions and review the answers they found to their questions. For older students, start a class discussion by asking, "What do you already know about topic 'X,' and what would you like to find out?" Clarify their ideas and expectations; again, follow-up after the trip to see how these may have changed.

3. Research Groups

Divide the class into small groups to do background research on different aspects of architecture/architectural heritage that they will be studying and devise activities for each group to carry out that will build on their roles as specialists. Using the term "study trip" instead of "field trip" helps students focus on how what they will be doing may be different from other

field trips they have taken. Conduct post-trip activities in which each group acts as a resource for the others on a joint project such as making a mural that draws on everyone's accumulated expertise.

4. Visuals & Speakers

If possible, use photos or slides you will be visiting for students to observe and examine. You might also bring in an architect or local historian, or another community resource, to talk about his or her experiences.

5. Worksheets

The day before the trip, go over worksheets or other activities students will be using on their field trip to make sure they understand what they will be doing.

Plan Walking Tour Activities:

What teaching strategies will you use on the walking tour to reach your field trip objectives? The goal is to create a variety of opportunities that enable each student to find new abilities, strengthen others and excel where possible. To accomplish this, the plans for your field trip need to be carefully thought out beforehand.

Many teachers have been quite surprised at how seriously students take their walking tour assignments. Students enjoy becoming involved with the sites and often accomplish much more than teachers expect. If you prepare materials in modular units, you can accommodate each student's pace having extra work available for those who finish early while not ressureing the others to complete more than they can handle. The most important thing is for students to have time to look and experience the sites on the tour. The activities you design are not ends in themselves but vehicles for accomplishing this.

There are two important points to keep in mind as you plan a walking tour teaching learning activities: perceptual skills and variety. Plan activities that require students to use perceptual skills, activities that encourage them to learn from their own observations not just from the tour guide. Encourage observation at every level: observation of details of overall scenes, of context, and of aesthetic and emotional dimensions as well as physical aspects.

Vary the pace of activities, intellectually and physically. Ask questions that draw on different levels of thinking skills based on observations and imagination. Pose questions in ways that require varied kinds of responses: short answers, simple sketches, fill-in-the blanks, complete-the-picture, matching, short essays, role-playing, etc. Plan activities that allow students to work in several social situations: alone, in pairs, in small groups, or as part of the whole class. You may wish to plan some time during which groups of students can visit sites of their choice, accompanied by their chaperones.

As you review the activities you have planned for your walking tour, ask yourself: are these activities related to the objectives? To pre- and post-visit activities? Do the activities focus on objectives? Are there any potential difficulties with doing these activities on a walking tour? Could these activities be done just as well as school? (if the answer is yes, you may want to rethink them.)

On The Walking Tour:

An architect, local historian, or the classroom teacher may lead walking tours. If the tour guide is someone other than yourself, contact the tour guide ahead of time to let your guide know what your class has been studying and what your pre-visit activities have been, so that he or she will be able to conduct the tour according to the level of your students' background. Let the guide know if there is something in particular you don't want your students to miss seeing or doing, or if there are special needs or interests of which he or she should be aware.

Using Worksheets:

Worksheets can be exciting, engrossing and fun! Because you design them for your students and your curriculum objectives, worksheets can be highly personalized and relevant. You can develop different versions, allowing students of varying abilities to be challenged, each at an appropriate level. Because worksheets provide a means of involving each student, of eliciting his or her own unique observations, responses, and perspectives, they can be extremely effective teaching tools.

On most tours it is much easier for students to see and hear if they are in small groups. Worksheets allow you to break the class into small groups that can work independently, each accompanied by a chaperone. This frees you, the teacher, to move among the groups and provide help on an individual basis. Having each group start at a different site and then move from one to another in round-robin fashion can minimize confusion and congestion. By the time everyone is finished with their worksheet activities, all will have covered the same territory.

Depending on your field trip theme, you can position worksheet activities as a treasure hunt, a game, etc. Be whimsical, if it suits the subject; use humor, wit, riddles, puns, and tongue twisters. Some teachers invent an imaginary creature or person appropriate to the field trip theme, who writes a letter of introduction to each student about the walking tour in which he or she is about to participate and who reappears in brief sketches with comments here and there throughout the worksheet pages.

Involve as many dimensions as possible when designing worksheet activities: cognitive, affective, and motor. Draw on the power of students' imaginations to take them behind the walls of the building and into other worlds and cultures. Ask questions that enable them to relate their own experiences to historical and foreign peoples, events, and environments. Provide opportunities in the worksheets for students to draw, take notes, discuss, outline, role-play, decide, argue, state preferences, hypothesize, predict, generalize, categorize, compare and contrast, to think, feel and create. Insert words of encouragement and enthusiasm throughout and include questions that elicit students' reactions to what they are experiencing.

Assemble the worksheet pages into a booklet for each student. Students may wish to add things of their own to the booklet and to design covers for them. The booklets will be useful references in subsequent classroom activities and students often value them highly as souvenirs of the walking tour.

Activity Ideas:

Some ideas for walking tour learning activities are suggested below. Some are based on your developing a worksheet, others are not. Some of the ideas can be carried out either in writing or verbally. Many are intended only to initiate student involvement with the sites; they are “jumping off places,” not complete field trips in themselves. Most, including some which are based on developing worksheets, can be used with students of various ages. We have tried to include a number of activities that can be used with younger students, that is, with non or beginning readers. However, even many of these activities can be used quite appropriately with older students as well.

1. Shapes & Colors

Draw different shapes on worksheets. As children observe each site, ask them to find and then circle the shapes they see. Or, print the names of different colors on a worksheet and have children find and circle the colors they see.

2. Pictures

Draw simple pictures of architectural details that can be found on the walking tour and ask children to circle or color them on their worksheets as they find them. You may wish to do several versions of this worksheet so that each child has a different set of things to find. A related activity which can be used with students of varying ages, is to construct worksheets with partial drawings of architectural details. Have students complete the drawings based on their observations. Younger children may wish to color the drawings as a post-trip activity.

3. Find How Many

On each worksheet, draw various architectural details of which one or more can be found on the walking tour. Distribute the worksheets and ask students to study the details carefully and write down how many of each they see.

4. Things That...

Develop a worksheet with several kinds of categories such as, “Things that hold something up,” “Things that are decorative,” “Things that protect,” “Things that hang on a wall,” “Things found inside houses,” and so on. Ask students to draw and/or name objects they see on the walking tour that fit each of the categories.

5. How it Feels

Ask each student to find something on the walking tour that would feel rough, sticky, smooth, slippery, sharp, cold, hot, wet, etc.

6. Something That is.....

Ask each student to find something on the walking tour that is sturdy, fragile, valuable, once alive, unusual, common, no longer used, etc.

7. Something I'd Like to Have....

Ask each student to find something on the tour that he or she would like to have for him or herself, and tell the others why.

8. Stories

Read stories, poems, legends, fables or myths relating to the neighborhood or area toured and have children act out the parts of the characters or illustrate the reading with puppets.

9. Describe a Site

Have each student find one site on the tour and write a description of it and then read it to the rest of the class. A related activity is to ask each student to sketch a design or pattern seen on a full-size piece of paper and make a note on the back where it was seen. Back in the classroom, have students try and remember where they saw each of the patterns the other drew.

10. Complete the Sentence

Complete the following sentences while observing a site: "I wonder....." "I wish..." "If I only knew...." "If I had lived then....." "If I were..."

11. Peep Hole Views

Make viewers by cutting round holes of several different sizes into sturdy pieces of paper. Ask students to observe a site carefully for a few minutes. Then ask them to view the site through each of the peepholes. Ask them to describe what they see, what they notice that they missed before and how their perspective changes with each of the viewers.

Post-Trip Activities:

The field trip isn't over when students get off the bus. Follow-up activities can reinforce and put students' walking tour learning experience activities into perspective, as well as build on the high levels of interest and enthusiasm generated by the walking tour for some time to come. Some general ideas for post-trip activities are given below..

1. Discussion

After the field trip, encourage students to discuss their reactions to their walking tour experiences: What did they like most? Least? And why? Have their feelings or ideas changed about architecture and old buildings? About the things they saw there? How, and why? Ask the, "If you were giving a friend a tour of the buildings you saw, what would you show him or her first? Last? Not at all? Why?"

2. Review Worksheets

If your students have done worksheet activities on the walking tour, go over them when you return to the classroom. Discuss their answers, ideas, experiences, and any questions they have about what they saw and did. If the trip has generated as many questions as it has answered, it has been successful.

3. Newspapers or Newsletters

Have students write articles for the school newspaper or publish a newsletter about their walking tour experiences for their fellow students and parents. Divide up responsibilities for different topics or phases of the walking tour among the students and encourage them to interview one another and to illustrate their stories with sketches or cartoons.

4. Experience Charts

Construct experience charts with younger children. Ask them to tell what they have seen, learned, and liked about the walking tour. You may wish to make several charts with different titles, for example, “The Ten Best Things We Saw on the Walking Tour,” or “Things I Didn’t Know About My Neighborhood Before.” Read them aloud several times and hang on the wall as a record of their trip.

5. Letters

Have students write thank you notes to the architects or local historians who were the tour guides and letter to their parents about their trip experiences. They could even make their own stationary using details, symbols or patterns observed on the walking tour.

Adapted from Teach the Minds, Touch the Spirit: A Guide to Focused Field Trips by Helen H. Voris, Maija Sedzielarz, & Carolyn P. Blackmon.