



Museum of Natural History

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

Suggestions for Success: Museum Field Trips

Museums are educational institutions that connect people with objects and ideas. Over the years, museums have committed tremendous resources to find ways to best support teachers and students. Museum research and evaluation studies have revealed many the ways in which children learn most effectively in museums. Some suggestions and strategies are described below focusing on the three phases of a field trip: Before the visit; at the museum; and after the visit.

1. Before the Visit

- Discuss with the museum contact the content you are interested in for your students to learn during their museum visit. The museum contact can help you choose the best program for your visit, or they may be able to customize an existing program to meet your needs.
- Make sure the purpose of the field trip is clear to the students and the chaperones to establish the appropriate atmosphere and your expectations for the day.
- Orient the students to this new environment – the museum. Discuss what a museum is, what museums do, what the students' expectations are, etc. Proper orientation to the museum will greatly reduce the students' initial novelty and anxiety that can distract them from their learning. Prior experiences, familiarity, even maps will help to orient the students.
- Link the trip to the students' learning in the classroom. Students respond positively when they understand their learning is for a purpose and related to current units.

- Provide as much orientation to the parent chaperones as possible. Students feel most comfortable and learn more when a knowledgeable adult is present in the group to facilitate questions and learning. Chaperone orientation should include expectations for the learning experience, background information on the content, orientation of the location of the field trip, and other necessary information.

- Additional pre-visit preparations
 - Provide classroom opportunities to learn about the content and/or objects in the museum (websites, discovery kits, books, etc.).
 - Utilize prepared materials provided by the museum – pre- and post-visit materials, teacher packets, etc.
 - Inform students of any assignments that will follow their trip so they can prepare.
 - Gather information from the students’ knowledge and prior experiences – “Who’s been there before, and what do you remember?”
 - Prepare learning tools for the students to use during the learning experience. Tools can be useful for helping the students focus and might include worksheets, handouts, scavenger hunts, etc.
 - Orient chaperones about medical needs for students, if necessary.
 - Make sure you have your class roster with you including emergency telephone numbers.
 - Remind parents and students of appropriate dress for the occasion.

2. At the Museum

- Briefly orient students and chaperones at the museum before beginning any work. Explain the schedule for the day including lunchtime. This orientation should also include bathroom locations and an emergency location (i.e. getting lost). Provide a map that has these locations highlighted for each group (if necessary).

- Allow students some choice and control over their own movement and learning. Allow students to move about, whenever possible, and determine their own course of learning. To prevent students from losing focus, learning periods should not exceed 60 minutes.
- Allow students to work and learn in small groups. Place the students in small groups in a manner that seems appropriate for the students and for the field trip location. Groups of 3 to 5 students work well in most environments and each group should have a parent chaperone if possible. Not all field trip destinations will require or benefit from work in small groups and some environments may work best with the class as a whole.

3. After the Visit

- Discuss the trip with your class – its' positive and negatives, what was learned, what questions they have, or questions the trip may have raised.
- Revisit the discussion on the function of museums and have students discuss and/or write about their learning experience in a journal or as a story, or have students write a critical review the museum, one of the exhibits, or the trip as a whole.
- Follow up the visit with at least one in-class lesson that directly reiterates the information from the museum visit, and if possible, continue to reinforce the experience by relating the visit to the students in-class work.
- Additional post-visit connections
 - Have students write a thank you letter to the museum or museum educator and have them include information about the content they learned or their favorite parts of the experience.

- Have students draw or paint a work that relates to their experience and expresses their feeling on it.
- Have the student museum groups create presentations for the class using the information learned.
- Use the museum's own resources (discovery trunks, teacher packets, etc.) to reinforce the learning.

Recognize that standards in different content areas can be met when museum visits are creatively integrated into existing activities within the classroom.

Sources:

Bailey, Elsa. Review of Selected References from the Literature Search on Field Trips/School Group Visits to Museums. Association of Science and Technology Centers. 1999.

Falk, John H. and Lynn D. Dierking. The Museum Experience. Whalesback Books. 1992.

Hein, George and Mary Alexander. Museums Places of Learning. American Association of Museums Education Committee. 1998.

Silbermann, Amy. Productive Partnership: Museum and School Alliances. The Guide to Math and Science Reform. The Annenberg/CPB Projects. 1999.

Compiled by Tim Godby, Teacher, Louisville Elementary School in partial requirement of the Master of Science Degree, Museum and Field Studies, University of Colorado. Additions and editing by Jim S. Hakala, Senior Educator, University of Colorado Boulder Museum of Natural History.