



Tips for Leading Outdoor Explorations

Taking a group of students outside can feel like an intimidating venture. These simple tips will make this worthwhile experience more enjoyable for you and your students

Before Going Outside

Generally speaking, the longer you plan on being outside, the more preparing you should be ready to do. If you're only going out for a few minutes, then don't overthink it, just go!

If you plan on being out longer, then consider the possible discomforts and needs you will face and have a plan for those. Some tips for longer explorations:

- Go to the bathroom BEFORE you go out.
- Drink water (or bring it with you)
- Dress for the weather.
- Pack simple supplies like tissues, bug spray, and a first aid kit.
- Frontload your expectations with your students.

Being Outside

Now that you are outside, you are ready for outdoor explorations! Here are some ways to make sure that you have success.

Gathering

Have a place to gather. Preferably a place that you can sit and that has shade. If you can't sit, then pick a spot where everyone can easily stand together. Ideally, the gathering spot is a place that you can easily see all your students once you disperse them for their exploring.

About This Activity

Grades: **all grades**

Key Topics: **Group Management**

Setting Boundaries

Before you disperse set up physical boundaries. You can use features that exist (such as trees, or fence) or make your own. Review those boundaries with your students before beginning.

Before dispersing, review the return call and what your expectations are for when they hear it. You can even practice it a few times. Set your group loose and then make the call, and have them practice coming back to the gathering spot.

Return Call

Have a signal for returning. It can be a bell or an animal sound. It should be loud enough to be heard by all your students.

For nearly 30 years, Imago has been leading students outside to study and learn from the natural world. Imago's Branching Out program leads outdoor education at schools, builds and supports outdoor learning stations and provides teacher resources for outdoor learning. Contact Imago for information on how we can help you get your students learning in nature.



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Review Your Expectations

Finally, before setting out on your explorations, review your expectations. Just because we are outside, doesn't mean that we can act totally wild. Aside from reviewing boundaries and your return call, remind your students about expectations: how they are treating nature, the materials, and each other (see "Respect the PONY"). Have a place that students who are not following expectations can go and calm down before being allowed to continue exploring.



Wrapping Up

You've gathered, prepared, and explored, now it's time to share what you've learned.

Give a Warning

A few minutes before you make your return call, give your students a heads up that they should be wrapping up.

Clean Up and Gather

Now as you give your return call, remind students how they should leave the space. This is the time to clean up, reset materials, and come back to the gathering spot.

Harvest: Tell Your Stories

This is the best part. At Imago, we call this the harvest. It's time for students to share their discoveries. Be ready with a few guided questions pertaining to your activity. Consider leaving time for students to share other things that they found while they were exploring. If you aren't able to comfortably Harvest outside, due to weather or group temperament, then head inside and Harvest in the classroom.

Review and Repeat

What went well? What could you do different next time? Each time you go outside you learn something new and it gets easier and more fun!