

Visit a Local Natural Area

Exploring local natural areas helps students to build their connection to, and comfort in, these places and environments. It can spark their curiosity about local biology, natural history, or even sociology, inspiring a lifelong interest in STEM careers, outdoor recreation, environmental conservation, and more. In addition, by getting outside of the classroom we can help students to gain new perspectives on themselves and their peers, their relationship to the world around them, and the importance of natural spaces in their lives.

AGES: All

INTENDED OUTCOMES: Feet (also Head, Hands, and Heart - depending on any goals that you set for your nature exploration time)

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

- Closed-toed shoes (good for walking), clothing appropriate for the weather
- Water, snack or lunch
- Permit – some natural areas, like Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, currently require a Special Use Permit for groups of over 25 people, so that the park can help to manage the impact of larger groups on the ecosystem. Generally these are free or low cost and can be applied for online, if necessary.

Suggested steps and/or focus for each grade level*:

STEPS (general):

- Set a goal for the outing. Do you want students to come away with a deeper understanding of a particular scientific concept? A question about the environment that they will research themselves? A positive association with the outdoors and a memory of a good time had outside with friends?
- Select a location and/or a provider (who likely has a predetermined list of areas) to help arrange the trip.
- Create a list of activities or a schedule for the outing, only as necessary to help you accomplish your goal. If you are working with a provider, be sure to express your goal to them to make sure that the activities that they choose align with what you want students to get out of the trip!
- Arrange logistics as necessary. These could include transportation, chaperones, lunches and permission slips – or just deciding what day to go play and explore outside on the schoolyard with students!
- Go and enjoy your time!

ECE-3rd GRADE:

- Start by fostering an awareness of the nature that exists on the schoolyard, including grass, trees, insects, birds, and squirrels. There is nature everywhere if we look for it!

- As they get older, begin to expand to nearby or adjacent areas (even within walking distance) such as greenbelts, parks, and streams.

4th – MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Facilitate opportunities for students to choose outdoor recreation experiences including hiking, biking, and rafting AND/OR field experiences in naturalizing, botany, entomology, ornithology, etc.
- Choose trips allow students to experience a variety of natural environments—including each major life zone of Colorado. Explore nature in both wilderness areas AND in urban areas.

HIGH SCHOOL

- In addition to what’s listed above, experience a variety of natural environments on a broadening scale (local to regional to national to global).

*For more detail on the grade-level focus for natural and social concepts and sense of place, please refer to the Guidelines



TIPS AND TRICKS

- Unstructured time in nature has been shown to be highly effective at creating connections to natural areas. Balance structured activities, like lessons and science-focused investigation, with time for students to explore or enjoy the place on their own (within boundaries of course).
- Group management is often a concern for those taking students outside for the first time. Set systems and guidelines with students before hand - and as you enter each new area (i.e. if you stop for lunch, set boundaries right away for where they can go). Try creating silly calls or cheers to get their attention quickly and practice them as a class before going outside. You can even have a specific one that they understand requires rapid attention for immediate safety concerns.
- If you are looking for activities that help to facilitate exploration of natural spaces, sort for other “Feet” activities on our website.



Relevant Standards

RWC09-GR.KS.4.GLE.1