TRIP TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Field trip season is fast upon us. Do you dread taking your class out of school to a museum? Or, do you look forward to it as a fun and interesting day for both you and your students.

The success of a museum field trip depends on advance planning. Yes, this takes time, but the payoff is well worth the time spent. Not only will your students benefit more from the field trip, but the museum staff will be better able to provide a quality experience for you.

The following list will help you prepare yourself and your classes for the Big Day. You may find many of these tips helpful for any kind of school outing.

1. If at all possible, visit the museum yourself before the field trip. In addition to exploring the exhibits, notice restroom locations, food facilities, and handicapped access, if applicable.

2. Choose a theme for your visit. It is often unwise to try to see an entire museum in one visit. Select a few exhibits that have something in common. For example, you might emphasize animal homes, animals that fly, or animals with fur.

3. If appropriate, make a short worksheet that will help your students focus on particular exhibits or objects within exhibits. Questions can be concrete, How many birds are in this scene? Or abstract, If you could be one of these animals, which one would it be? Why?

4. Prepare your students before the trip. Introduce not only your theme, but also what a museum is and what they might expect to see there. Many museums have pre-trip materials for teachers available upon request. The KU Museum of Natural History has a filmstrip, "The Meaning of a Museum of Natural History," which is excellent preparation for a field trip. Try to involve students in the planning as much as possible. Get out a map and have them trace the bus route to the museum.

5. Choose competent chaperons. Some teachers find that the adults they have brought along are more trouble than the students! Be sure chaperones know your game plan. Divide your students into small groups responsible to each chaperon.
6. Plan your travel time carefully. Remember, school buses travel more slowly than passenger cars. Allow an extra 15 minutes for the bus, plan an extra 15 minutes if you are unfamiliar with the museum's location. Allow even more time if students will need restrooms before their museum program begins.

7. Plan lunch carefully. Children get uncomfortable when they are too hungry, so stay as close to their normal lunch time as possible. If students are to bring lunches, provide a box on the bus to contain them. Most museums do not allow food on the premises, so decide ahead of time where you will eat—on the bus, outside, or at a park. Have contingency plans if it rains. If you plan to purchase lunches, notify restaurants in advance that you are coming. You may be able to reserve a room.

8. Make name tags for students and adults. Include the name of the school on the tag. Younger students may enjoy making their own tags. Many adhesive tags do not survive the gyrations of an active child. Safety pins or string necklaces wear better. Headbands are also fun.

9. Plan activities for the bus ride. Quiz games, counting games, or theme-related activities are welcome relief from "99 bottles of beer on the wall."

10. Establish a policy with regard to the gift shop, i.e., if, when, and how long students may visit it. Many shops are very small and teachers must be prepared to regulate and oversee the numbers who enter.

11. If you are to receive a special program at the museum, have your students divided into the agreed upon groups before you reach the museum. (You could use A, B, C; or 1, 2, 3; or Antelopes, Buffaloes, and Cougars.) Likewise, collect money for fees during the week prior to the trip, not during the program.

12. Be certain that a teacher accompanies each group receiving a special program or tour. Museum staff should not be expected to deal with discipline problems; parents/chaperons are often not as effective as teachers in demanding appropriate behavior.

13. After the trip, evaluate for yourself and other staff what was successful and what wasn't. Ask the students for feedback, too. Don't be hurt, however, if lunch was the highlight of their day!
14. Back in your own classroom, go over the worksheets students filled out at the museum, discuss the special program or tour, and build upon the chosen theme of your visit. Thank-you letters to museum staff are appreciated. [And helps them justify new and continued programs. Ed.] Presentations to other grades about the trip help the students remember their experience and generate enthusiasm for a similar experience in their listeners.

Lastly, don't forget that your greatest allies in planning your museum field trip are the people who work at the museum. They want you to have fun and they want you to learn about the "good stuff" in their museum. Don't hesitate to call on them for assistance as you plan your Big Day!

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