



# PLANNING AND EXECUTING A SUCCESSFUL FIELD TRIP

By Alexander “Sandy” Pope IV

## RESOURCES



### ONLINE

#### Promise of Place

[www.promiseofplace.org](http://www.promiseofplace.org)

Resources for place-based education and using the natural and cultural environ-

ment as a foundation for learning.

#### PEEC: Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative

<http://www.peecworks.org/index>

Best practices and easy-to-understand research for educators who wish to know more about the benefits of field trip education, or who may need to lobby for field trip support in their school.



### BOOKS

#### *Teaching history with museums: Strategies for K-12 social studies.*

Marcus, A., Stoddard, J., & Woodward, W. (2012). New York, NY: Routledge.

*Learning in the museum.* Hein, G. (1998). New York, NY: Routledge.

Field trips allow students of all ages to engage directly with materials. They offer a break from the classroom routine and provide opportunities for active learning by allowing students to encounter authentic information, create durable memories, and assess material critically. Field trips also establish place connections between people and their community, and their experiential nature allows for learning regardless of language, a key consideration with increasingly diverse classrooms. What steps are needed to carry out an effective educational field trip?

### 1. Consider your classroom needs.

The best field trips provide a rich, interdisciplinary experience that supplements, rather than replaces, classroom instruction. Leaving the school grounds to visit an actual site provides authentic learning experiences that cannot be duplicated in the classroom. Ask yourself: What sort of experience will help my students better understand the material they are learning?

Survey the options in your area by asking for suggestions from teachers in your school or even searching for a local “museum” or “field trip” on the Internet.

### 2. Make contact.

Find contact names for those in charge of educational programming and visits at museums and other sites to get information about available programs, upcoming or recurring events, and pricing. You also can share your specific goals with the site. The staff may be able to create a particular experience for your students based on your specific needs or interests.

### 3. Secure permissions and chaperones.

Your school or district will have its own policies for securing field trip permissions, which likely will include requirements for chaperones. An effective way to recruit chaperones is through an email letter to parents. Chaperones will need to know a rough outline for the day, including the schedule and plans for meals or snacks.

You then will need to complete required transportation paperwork. This will involve approval for costs associated with the trip, including bus transportation.

#### 4. Prepare your students.

Because students will be taken out of their normal environment and routine—and exposed to new people, places, and sounds—the teacher must prepare students for what they will experience.

The preparation depends on the type of field trip. For a traditional art museum, consider laying down tape 10–12 inches from the wall in your classroom so students can practice keeping a safe distance from pictures or artifacts. For an outdoor museum, take students outside to practice lining up and listening. For older students who are expected to take notes, let them practice writing on a clipboard.

Whatever the trip you have planned and the age of your students, you want to provide a preview of what the day will hold.

#### 5. Visit.

During the visit, your primary role is caretaker, but you also are engaged in the educational process. This includes helping students link the field trip to learning from the classroom and maintaining order and behavior.

Many teachers like to prepare activities like scavenger hunts for their students. You can find good ideas at Promise of Place (see Resources).

When keeping track of students is challenging, make sure to ABC—Always Be Counting!

#### 6. Thank and reflect.

After the field trip, plan a review day for reflection, when students can share something from the trip, and you can take the opportunity to link the field trip to classroom learning.

Finally, sending a thank-you note does more than show appreciation. While it does thank the site staff for their time and expertise—particularly appreciated at small sites that can use your note to demonstrate their value to the community—it also allows students to think about what they learned or liked from their visit, with each of them possibly contributing a notable part of the trip.

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### Field Trip to the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art, Salisbury, Maryland

The Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art provides a fascinating look at the intersection between the natural environment and the culture of Maryland’s Eastern Shore. A variety of permanent and rotating indoor and outdoor exhibits engage the students.

#### PLANNING

The Ward Museum has a dedicated education staff to answer requests. I used the website to send an initial request and received a response within 48 hours; yours may take longer, depending on the site. The response included a [form](#) to complete to help finalize the planning process.

#### APPROVAL

My school uses a specific [form](#) for field trip approval. Teachers wanting to take students on field trips need to complete the form and receive written approval from the principal. Particularly for trips that involve added costs, it is important to explain the relevance of the field trip to what your students are learning. This form also includes a helpful list of reminders for teachers. Use this list when you prepare your students, and on the day of the visit.

#### SCHEDULE

Students needed to know the schedule and that the visit included lunch in a cafeteria, as well as time inside the museum and outside near the lake. We reviewed a simple schedule: Leave school at 8:40 a.m., arrive at the Ward at 9:00 a.m., get introductions and a walkthrough of the main exhibit hall until 11:30 a.m., eat lunch, have time outside, and return to school by 1:45 p.m.

—By Sandy Pope