

Bear Creek Outdoor Classroom

Study and Safety Guidelines



Adapted and prepared by Frederic Vallowe
from
"The Schoolyard Habitat Development Safety Guide,"
by Michael Schneider and Jill Schimmelpfennig Carter.
The Illinois ENTICE Schoolyard Habitat Development Workshop
(2005), Freeburg, Illinois.

A Note to Faculty and Staff

Bear Creek provides us with a valuable teaching tool and our students with an additional incentive for learning. The outdoor classroom gives students the opportunity to observe first hand the natural phenomena discussed in the traditional classroom, giving them direct hands-on learning experiences in a natural setting.

In any educational setting there are safety considerations which must be dealt with so that our students may have the best possible learning environment; this packet is to help you be aware of safety considerations and offer information for preventative techniques.

Many of the responsibilities with using Bear Creek are similar to those required in a regular classroom, but there are differences and the outdoor classroom may have hidden risks for a greater number of students. Outside, students might find sunburn, biting insects, ticks, contact dermatitis from plants, turned ankles, airborne allergens, very poisonous plants/mushrooms (if ingested) or general mischief. The learning areas along the creek are checked on a regular basis for general safety, but the following responsibilities must also be considered:

1. Schedule your use of the area with the high school principal so that routine inspections can be performed before the site is used.
2. Discuss and establish a clear set of objectives for the students to accomplish. (One of these objectives should be that students understand they are to report to you any activities or situations which may present safety risks.)
3. Provide the list of rules (see Bear Creek Safety Rules on page 4) to students and assess their understanding of those rules.
4. Make certain that students are wearing the proper clothing for the activity and for their specific level of involvement.
5. Make certain each student has a learning role in the activity.
6. Make certain you are aware of individual allergy/health concerns.
7. Evaluate each outdoor experience to determine the relevance and safety of the activity, as well as to determine what can be changed to increase safety, participation and learning. Report any areas of concern to the high school principal.
8. Discuss with your building principal whether any specific activity will require a parental permission form.
9. Determine whether additional supervision may be required. (Advanced Biology students may be of help with a variety of activities.)

10. Notify the school nurse of your lesson plan if you have identified special needs students. Many parts of the trail are wheelchair accessible. You may also consider entering her cell phone number on your speed dial. A first aid kit is available in room A179 (Mr. Vallowe's room) for trips to the outdoor learning areas. The kit does not contain an Epi-pen.

11. Be prepared to identify a specific place in the learning area if a 911 call is required. A map of the outdoor classroom has been provided to emergency care responders. Consult the Bear Creek Brochure or the map on page 5 in this guideline for general orientation.

12. Non-point pollution makes it difficult to determine the water quality of Bear Creek on any given day at any given time. It is important for students to understand that the water is not safe to drink and that they must wash their hands before eating or putting gum in their mouths. Water quality is monitored through the inventory of pollution sensitive invertebrates. (Water quality during the past school terms has usually been good to excellent, as shown by the number of fish species, frogs and invertebrates present.)

13. Keep aware of weather conditions. In the event of sudden, severe weather guide students to the vocational arts building and follow their emergency procedures. Do not use the area along the creek if gusting or strong winds are predicted and/or experienced.

14. **Students should never be allowed to pick-up, poke, injure or kill snakes in the outdoor classroom.** Snakes kill fewer than 12 people a year in the United States. Most of those deaths are from non-native, captive snakes. In Hamilton County there are two identified species of poisonous snakes: the copperhead and the rattlesnake. The latter is so rare it is offered protection in Illinois under the Endangered Species Act. Neither of these snakes is aggressive, nor has either of them been observed on our 40 acre campus. Garter snakes and rat snakes are the most commonly observed snakes, both are harmless to humans.

15. **Students should stay on the trail to avoid contact with poison ivy.** Students need the skill of being able to identify poison ivy. Poison ivy is fairly easy to identify because of its three leaflets and white berries. All parts of the plant contain oil that causes an allergic reaction in primates and hamsters. The oil can be transferred to skin through direct contact with the plant, carried through smoke or transferred from clothes, sides of cars or tools. Contrary to popular folk-knowledge, it is not possible to catch poison ivy from contact with someone's rash. If students brush against poison ivy, washing thoroughly with soap and cold water, or dabbing alcohol on the affected area immediately after exposure will help remove the poisonous oil. The restrooms in the vocational arts building, or next to the band room in the Commons, are available for washing up.

16. All students should be visible to the classroom teacher or additional supervisors at all times.

Bear Creek Outdoor Classroom Safety Rules for Students

1. Protect your eyes. Appropriate eye protection must be worn at all times when using chemicals, testing water samples, or when working with tools or equipment that may cause flying debris. If you wear contact lenses, check with your teacher about your safety in any activity involving chemicals.
2. Wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Clothing can protect you from bugs, plants, chemicals and sunburn. Proper footwear can protect you from rocks, thorns, slips and slides.
3. Do not taste any plants that have not been clearly identified by your teacher as safe to eat. If you have food allergies, do not taste anything. There are deadly leaves, roots and/or berries growing along Bear Creek.
4. Wash your hands with soap and COLD water after leaving the outdoor learning area. This procedure is advised to reduce the risk of skin irritation from poison ivy and infections from micro-organisms.
5. Know the hazards of the materials being used. Read labels carefully to make sure you know you are using the correct chemical the correct way. Be careful with tools! Ask directions on how to use a tool if you are unfamiliar with it.
6. Know the safety equipment. How do you respond in an emergency?
7. Never carry out an experiment or an activity that has not been assigned by your teacher. Share your ideas with your teacher first.
8. Work in assigned areas only. Many areas in the outdoor classrooms are under development. One misplaced foot can undo several years of work. For your protection from poison ivy, **stay on the identified path and/or in the identified learning station.**
9. Never harm wildlife or plants no matter how exciting or ugly they maybe. There is not an endless supply of lizards, frogs, snakes or pawpaws in the outdoor classroom. These plants and animals are an important part of the outdoor classroom. Leave them alone for others to experience.
10. Stay safe! Never engage in horseplay, creekbank climbing or jumping, sitting on the bridge railings, games or pranks. Careless behavior can endanger you, others and the plants and animals that call the outdoor classrooms home. Remember that using the outdoor classrooms is a privilege. Report any accidents or unsafe conditions to your teacher immediately.
11. Listen and look! The quieter and slower you walk, the more wildlife you'll see. Look closely. There are many things hiding from you.