Outdoor Resources

Taking Students Outdoors

Outside the door of most classrooms are a variety of opportunities for taking students outdoors. School grounds and public parks are especially rich areas for outdoor classroom activities.

At each grade level, the first Q&E activity serves as an introductory etiquette activity to help students establish an outdoor ethic and develop an awareness of appropriate behavior while visiting habitat areas. These etiquette activities are appropriate to the grade level and tie to the theme of the series. Students can be reminded of this etiquette activity throughout the unit as needed to help modify behavior.

When taking students outdoors it is important to tell students that the rules of the classroom apply equally to outdoor classrooms. Emphasize that the outdoor time is not a ‘recess’ or a ‘camp’ experience where boisterous games and sporting activities are often an expectation. Instead the ‘outdoor classroom’ is a place to study and appreciate nature.

While it is important to emphasize appropriate outdoor behavior, make sure to explain that the rules are to protect the animals and plants that live in the area. Students have misunderstood the rules to mean that wild areas are unsafe and that plants are harmful. “Stay on the trail!” “Don’t touch the plants!” and “Don’t pick the berries, they might be poisonous!” can sound alarming. Also encourage students to come back with their families and enjoy more intimate exploration and experiences.

School Grounds for Outdoor Education

Outdoor education opportunities vary from school to school and over time. Many schools have developed wonderful nature classrooms, with native plant gardens or greenbelt restorations on school grounds. Some schools have already been landscaped with native plants. Even small landscapes provide opportunities to observe soil invertebrates, wildlife, plant growth, seasonal variations as a component of Q&E activities. Uncovering opportunities sometimes takes close observation. We have worked at schools with dozens of native plant species already occurring in their mature landscapes, though most school staff were unaware that this resource was at their front door. Many schools have greenbelts included on the school grounds which provide opportunities to implement all of the Q&E activities.

Developing school native plant gardens provides amazing learning and the resulting gardens offer many advantages over using nearby parks or habitat areas. The following are a few of the primary advantages of using school grounds for Q&E activities:
• Proximity to classroom for short, frequent or impromptu visits
• Potential for a strong sense of stewardship
• Ability to harvest from plants (berries, leaf pressing, seeds, etc.), especially if designed as food or ethnobotany resource gardens.
• Hardscape enhancements such as pathways, signage, fencing and seating are easier to implement with more available resources and a less restrictive approval process.

Public Parks for Outdoor Education

The Seattle urban area is dotted with dozens of small to large parks, many of which contain natural habitat areas with native plantings. In the past decade there have been hundreds of restoration projects at these parks, restoring native plant communities and their associated wildlife communities. In many locations, it is possible to walk a few blocks from school and encounter a range of wildlife from dragonflies to bald eagles, hummingbirds to blue herons, squirrels to muskrats, and Pacific chorus frogs to turtles. The plant diversity in restorations has increased to include hundreds of species of native plants, many of which were extirpated in the early part of the last century.

Seattle natural areas were preserved as early as 1903 and some have remnant old growth forests. These are true gems in the middle of the Seattle urban area and include Seward and Schmitz park. Others have had 80-90 years to grow back from logging and now have mature second growth plant communities. Stewardship groups have worked hard to restore the plant diversity, removing non-native invasive plants such as blackberry and ivy. Schools within walking distance of parks that have natural habitat areas, or are undergoing habitat restoration, are wonderful resources for implementing education activities. Major parks such as Seward Park and Washington Park Arboretum are worth a bus ride for special field trips. Some considerations for visiting Seattle parks for education activities include:

• Students can see large, working plant communities and study their ecology.
• Wildlife sightings of unusual urban wildlife such as eagle, muskrat, salmon and heron are more likely in larger natural areas.
• Comparisons can be made to school ground habitats and plants.
• Most Seattle parks have associated stewardship groups or parks staff that can host classes, assist with implementing Q&E or other outdoor activities, or provide student stewardship activities such as native plantings and non-native plant removal. Q&E activities provide ideal links to stewardship activities as students rotate through ‘work stations’ and ‘education stations’.

Basic Outdoor Etiquette

• Stay on trails: heavy traffic has a major impact on soils compaction, disturbs wildlife breeding and raising of young, and harms plant growth, especially the more tender groundcover plants.
• Do not collect living plant material in public parks. Uprooting, damaging or collecting plant materials is forbidden in city, county and state parks. While it is okay to collect berries, be sure to know the identity of any berry before eating. And make sure to leave plenty for the wildlife.
• When traveling in large groups along trails be sure to allow right of way for other park users. Typically people travel along their right side of the path, allowing others to pass on the left.
• Do not chase, follow or collect wildlife. Native wildlife is protected by law, and harassment by humans and pets is illegal. If you suspect you are near a den or nest of wildlife, leave them plenty of room. Wildlife includes frogs, turtles, butterflies and other fascinating, previously commonly collected creatures.
• Keep dogs on leash, or preferably at home. Though dogs do not usually accompany school groups, occasionally parent volunteers may bring their pets. Dogs are far more threatening to wildlife than humans and will hamper opportunities to view wildlife.
• Keep noise levels down for other park or school grounds occupants, both animal and human.

Creating outdoor seating areas can help manage students.

Q&E’s are designed to require a minimum of supplies.
Seattle Public Parks

There are scores of parks in the Seattle urban area, from small neighborhood playgrounds to natural greenbelts to large multi-use parks with facilities such as sports fields and pools. Some include environmental learning centers which provide a variety of programs for the public and school groups. The parks listed here have substantial natural habitat areas, are being restored with native plants and habitat areas, and are within walking distance of schools, which makes them ideal for implementing Quick & Easy Habitat Education activities. Parks in which Starflower Foundation has assisted the community with restoration projects are marked with an asterisk (*). There are many other fine parks, some of which may be in your neighborhood, that also have wonderful habitat areas and habitat restoration projects to visit with your students.

### Parks with Education Facilities and Programs

#### Carkeek Park
186 acres along Puget Sound with beach, salmonid creek, riparian and forest habitat.

#### Discovery Park
534 acres along Puget Sound with tidal beaches, meadow, riparian and forest habitats. A walk along Salmon Bay may reveal sea lions, eagles and juvenile salmon.

#### Washington Park Arboretum
230 acres along Lake Washington and the Montlake Cut with a boardwalk through wetlands, and trails through woods with trees from around the world, including a Pacific Northwest native plant collection.

#### Seward Park*
300 acres located on a peninsula in Lake Washington, this park is a rarity in Seattle, with old growth forests and habitat that supports bald eagle nests. The environmental learning center is surrounded by a native plant garden.

#### Camp Long
68 acres on the ridge overlooking the Duwamish watershed with wetlands, forests and native plant gardens. There are picnic shelters ideal for activities with students.

### Habitat Area Community Parks

#### Colman Park *
24 acres along Lake Washington which has been restored with riparian, wetland and upland forest habitat. One of the original Olmstead designed parks with architecture from the early 1900’s, this park has a paved trail that stretches from the shoreline to upland forest.

#### Frink Park *
17 acres along Lake Washington Blvd. with a wooded creek and ravine with numerous trails. An active community group has implemented habitat restoration activities and trails improvements.

#### Genesee Meadows *
Located along Lake Washington, this park was previously a dump and landfill, which has been restored as a wetland meadow with upland forest. The diversity of native plants and habitat attracts large numbers of birds and insects.

#### Greg Davis *
Located along Longfellow Creek, this small park is being restored to highly diverse meadows and riparian forest by neighbors, youth groups and nearby schools.

#### Lakeridge Park
35 acres with a creek which outlets into Lake Washington. Formerly known as ‘Dead Horse Canyon’, this park has undergone a restoration to the forested understory. A trail follows the creek through a mature forest canopy.

#### Lincoln Park
135 acres along Puget Sound with beach access and many trails through forested areas.

#### Madrona Park *
31 acres located on Lake Washington with a beach and trails through a wooded hillside. The forested ravine has been undergoing habitat restoration by an active neighborhood group and nearby schools.

#### Magnuson (Warren G.) Park *
350 acres along Lake Washington with a variety of uses, including natural areas on Promontory Point with native plant restorations, and a butterfly garden developed by Northwest Montessori school. This new park has many stewardship opportunities with an active stewardship group.

#### Me-Kwa-Mooks *
3.5 acres bordering Puget Sound with trails through a wooded hillside. Nearby schools and the community have participated in restoration and park improvement projects at this small park.

#### Pritchard Beach *
19 acres along Lake Washington, with a beach and restored wetland edged with a variety of forest habitats. A rock amphitheatre hosts classes who study the variety of wildlife and native plants which thrive there. Stewardship opportunities are available through an active stewardship group.

#### Roxhill Park *
The headwaters of Longfellow Creek, and possibly Fauntleroy Creek, this park has recently been restored to wetlands with a great diversity of bog, meadow and wetland plants, bordered by forests.

#### Schmitz Preserve Park
53 acres of fine old growth forest along a creek which empties into Puget Sound. A loop trail easily transports students along the trail to observe old growth trees and wildlife. An active stewardship group is continuing to preserve and restore this park.

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*Photo by Heidi Bohan*
Additional Resources

Field Guides for Use with Q&E Activities

Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast by Pojar & Mackinnon
Plants & Animals of the Pacific Northwest by Eugene N. Kozloff
Familiar Birds of the Northwest by Harry B. Nehls
Birds of Seattle and Puget Sound by Chris C. Fisher

Education Activity Guides to Extend Q&E Activities

Plants
Trees are Terrific (Ranger Rick’s NatureScope) by Judy Braus, editor (Teacher resource & activity guide)

Wildlife
City Kids and City Critters! Activities for Urban Explorers by Roberts & Huelbig
Project WILD- K-12 Activity Guide by Council for Environmental Education (Wildlife focused activities)

Birds, Birds, Birds (Ranger Rick Naturescope) by Sandra Stotksy (Teacher resource & activity guide)
Sharpening Observations Skills
Sharing Nature with Children - Joseph Cornell (Naturalist activity guide)
The Private Eye: Looking/ Thinking by Analogy- Kerry Rueff (Activities using jeweler’s loupes for science inquiry)

Education Supplies for Activity Materials

Catalogs:
Acorn Naturalists: Resources for the Trail and Classroom- 800-422-8886 (M-F, 7am-5pm PST)
Web: www.acornnaturalists.com

Resources for Garden Based Education from Gardens for Growing People- 415-663-9433
Email: growpepl@svn.net Web: www.svn.net/growpepl

Local Retailers:
Ben Franklin- multiple locations throughout Seattle area
Michael’s Crafts- multiple locations throughout Seattle area