

How to select a stream to visit with your students

Consider your students' physical abilities.

This might be obvious, but even if you don't have students with physical impairments, you should also consider their ability to balance, step over things, and general mobility. This changes dramatically with age. I would never take my fourth-grade students to some of the places I took my eighth-grade students. Ten-year-olds just aren't as strong and hearty, in general, as thirteen-year-olds.

Use your human resources first.

Talk to parents, PTO members, and coworkers who live in the town in which you teach. Tell them you are looking for a stream to visit with your students that is easy to access and within five miles of the school, preferably. I asked a parent of a former student if I could access a stream through his yard. He agreed, and although the access was too steep and the water too rough for kids, he told me about another stream that was perfect for my fourth-grade students.

Use topos or Google Earth

If you don't get any leads from people, then consult your maps. Look for streams that cross roads for easy access. If you see topo lines close together, you know that the topography there is a steep incline; likely there is a waterfall of some sort. Look for several potential locations and then take some time after school to see if they are safe and accessible.

Visit the site

At each site, watch for hazards such as wire fencing and poison ivy. Walking should be reasonably level with solid banking. Consider the current. If your students will be wading in the water, it shouldn't be higher than their knees. Consider what your students will do at the site. What is the stream back like? Is it easy to get in and out

of the water? Finally, be sure there is a place for the bus to pull over to safely let students out. The bus will also need adequate space nearby to turn around.

Get permission, even if you don't need it.

In Maine, people are permitted to walk down a waterway from the center to the high water line. Also, there is an *unwritten* rule that implies permission is granted unless the land is posted. However, it is best to ask the landowner for permission to access a stream via their land.

Also, be familiar with landowner liability laws for your state. In Maine, The Landowner Liability Law protects landowners from liability if someone is injured on their land.