

Wilderness Orientation Program

Life Learning Academy Project-Based Curriculum

Project Title: New Student Wilderness Orientation Program

Project Design Team and/or Instructors: Josh Brankman, Nancy Bloch, Park Guthrie

Subject Area(s): Team-building, Community-Building, New Student Orientation

Project Overview:

On this week-long backpacking trip to Sequoia National Park or the Desolation Wilderness Area (located outside of South Lake Tahoe, CA), new students practice productive conflict management, effective group dynamics, and self-introspection, while practicing environmentally-conscious backcountry living. In groups comprised of seven student participants, 3 adult leaders, and one veteran student leader, the new students rely on themselves and one another to confront the difficulties of both living in the woods and as part of a community where people are involved with and concerned about each other. Veteran students, who have been chosen by the trip leaders and trained in wilderness skills, accompany the group to provide peer support for new students. This component of the wilderness program provides an invaluable opportunity for new students to bond with each other as they prepare to face the challenges and expectations of our unique school community.

Educational Standards Addressed:

While there are no specific standards associated with the new student wilderness Orientation Program, schools may want to use this program to build community among new students transitioning into a new school/learning environment.

Expected Student Learning:

Objectives	Outcomes
1. Students will successfully complete a difficult, arduous wilderness trip consistent with school philosophy and rules.	1. Students will hike, backpack, and cook in the backcountry over the course of 6 days, following a rigorous, yet achievable schedule using skills associated with the school's "8 Guiding Principles".
2. Students will become familiar to school group processes and conflict management.	2. Students will engage in problem-solving activities, team-building activities, cook with one another, meet and discuss challenges, take turns acting as "group leader," engage in journaling, provide feedback and praise, and confront real life fears in the backcountry.

3. Students will begin working on increasing their literacy skills both in reading and writing.	3. Students will journal, read short stories and one full-length text, discussing the main points and making connections to their own lives and experiences.
4. Students will bond with one another.	4. Through rigorous, intimate outdoor living, students will get to know one another without the boundaries of typical "home" attitudes.

Project Outline:

While any program's wilderness trips should be carefully designed to meet the specific needs of the organization and participants, the following outline can be used as a guide for the major activities and processes of a new student wilderness program. Additionally, it is important to recognize and communicate the inherent risks involved with overnight field trips and to plan accordingly.

- 1) Staff obtain Wilderness First Responder Certification (in addition to personal experience in the backcountry)
- 2) Staff develop Safety management/Emergency Plan
- 3) Staff obtain wilderness equipment such as: clothing, hiking boots, stoves, fuel, first aid kit, tents, backpacks, sleeping bags, water bottles, etc.
- 4) Staff research trip location including necessary permits, limitations, specific safety information, travel plans, etc.
- 5) Staff develops necessary release forms and legal documentation.
- 6) Staff plans transportation allowing for at least one vehicle at a trailhead for safety.
- 7) Staff organizes student orientation session before the trip, providing parents with necessary information, and introducing the trip plan, procedures, and equipment with student participants.
- 8) Staff takes students to trip location, providing first day introduction, reviews rules and expectations, participates in group games, and outlines the plan for the entire trip.
- 9) Trip days consist of short hiking sections (typically 1-3 miles) with regular breaks for water, snacks, and rest. Hiking begins after breakfast has been eaten, water bottles filled with purified/filtered water, camp has been cleaned and packed up, and group has checked-in on the process. Leader of the day meets with trip staff about the plan for the day and disseminates this information to the group.
- 10) After the day's hiking section, students set up camp, refill and filter water, and either a) hang out/swim, b) participate in a group activity, c) read/journal.
- 11) Dinner and most meals are prepared by cook groups consisting of 2-3 students and one adult supervisor. Meals are communal activities with everyone sitting in a circle and waiting to start until everyone has been served.
- 12) Evenings consist of more fun time, debrief of the day, praise for the student leader(s), etc.

Texts and Supporting Materials:

Planning and Management:

- 1) Pearson, Claudia and Mike Clelland. The NOLS Cookery, National Outdoor Leadership School.
- 2) Harvey, Mike. The National Outdoor Leadership School's Wilderness Guide: The Classic Handbook, National Outdoor Leadership School.
- 3) Priest, Simon and Michael A. Gass. Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming, Human Kinetics Publishers, 1997.
- 4) Curtis, Rick. The Backpacker's Field Manual: A Comprehensive Guide to Mastering Backcountry Skills, Three Rivers Press. 1998.
- 5) Gass, Michael. Administrative Practices of Accredited Adventure Programs, Association of Experiential Education.

Course Readings:

- 6) Johnson, Spencer. Who Moved My Cheese? Putnum. 1998.
- 7) Coelho, Paolo. The Alchemist, Harper, San Francisco. 1995.
- 8) Various Short Stories chosen by program staff.
- 9) Blank Journals for students including copy of school/program Guiding Philosophy, Principles, etc.