

FIELD TRIP WISDOM NOTE #5

THE FIELD TRIP DOESN'T END WHEN YOU GET HOME

Turning Field Notes into a Permanent Portfolio

The bus may be parked. The packs may be unpacked. But the learning is not finished.

THE WISDOM

The field notebook captures the experience. The portfolio preserves the learning.

SIX-WORD MEMOIR

The trip ended. The learning didn't.

Field Trip Wisdom Notes • Gordon Taylor Davis

WHEN THE BUS COMES HOME

For many students, a field trip seems to end when the bus pulls back into the school parking lot. The backpacks are dropped, the muddy shoes come off, and the field notebook is pushed into a desk or backpack.

But that is exactly when another important part of the learning should begin.

During the trip, students have been collecting raw evidence of experience: measurements, weather observations, plant notes, shells and tracks, sketches, watercolors, museum history, worship reflections, maps, questions, quotations, and small details that caught their attention.

Those notes are not the finished product. They are the material from which understanding can be built.

THE WISDOM

A field trip becomes more powerful when students return to the experience after they return home.

The work after the trip asks students to slow down, look again, decide what mattered, organize what they learned, and create something permanent. In doing so, they discover that the trip was not simply a day away from school. It became part of their education.

The Teacher's Shift

Do not ask only, "Did they enjoy the trip?" Ask, "What will they do with what they noticed?"

Experience becomes learning when students revisit it, interpret it, connect it, and preserve it.

THE FIELD NOTEBOOK IS RAW DATA

In the field, the notebook should be messy. It is a working document. A student may jot down a temperature beside a watercolor, sketch a shell next to a question, record the wind and rain, copy a museum date, draw an animal track, or write a sentence from worship.

That is exactly what a field notebook is supposed to do: catch the experience while it is happening.

THE WISDOM

Do not make the field notebook so perfect that students become afraid to use it.

What Might Be Collected?

- Weather: temperature, clouds, wind, rain, tides, sunrise, or daily conditions.
- Plants: names, leaf shapes, bark, flowers, habitat, sketches, measurements, and questions.
- Animals: birds, horses, insects, tracks, scat, shells, feeding signs, and behavior.
- Science data: stream measurements, water-quality results, tree measurements, transects, or other field investigations.
- History: museum notes, dates, maps, buildings, people, artifacts, and stories connected with the place.
- Art: watercolors, sketches, color studies, photographs, and visual details.
- Reflection: worship notes, Sit Spot/TAG observations, six-word memoirs, quotations, prayers, and personal discoveries.

Whether the trip is canoeing, camping, backpacking, visiting a museum, studying a stream, exploring a forest, collecting shells, examining flowers, or investigating archaeology, the principle remains the same:

Record it while you are there. Make sense of it when you return.

FROM NOTEBOOK TO PORTFOLIO

After the trip, students return to their notebooks and begin selecting the pieces that best tell the story of what they experienced and learned.

The permanent portfolio is not simply a scrapbook. It is a student-created record of evidence, thought, art, science, history, and reflection.

A SIMPLE RHYTHM

COLLECT → SELECT → ORGANIZE → CREATE → REFLECT

1. Collect

Bring together the field notebook, loose data sheets, watercolors, maps, photographs, museum information, worship notes, and other records from the trip.

2. Select

Students choose the observations and information that best represent the trip. Selection requires judgment: What was important? What surprised me? What evidence supports what I learned?

3. Organize

Arrange the material into meaningful sections rather than simply following the order in which papers came out of the backpack.

4. Create

Transfer the chosen material onto permanent cardstock pages. Glue in data, drawings, photographs, maps, written reflections, and other evidence.

5. Reflect

Finish by asking students what they now understand that they did not understand before the trip.

The portfolio turns scattered experiences into a story of learning.

BUILD A BOOK THAT LOOKS LIKE THE TRIP

One of the most memorable ways to preserve a field experience is to let the portfolio itself become a piece of art.

Use cardstock for the cover and interior pages. Each student chooses a symbol that represents the trip: perhaps a flower, a shell, a horse, a ferry, a leaf, a bird, a track, a canoe, or an archaeological artifact.

That shape becomes the visual identity of the book.

THE DESIGN IDEA

Cut the chosen shape into the cover and repeat that cutout through the cardstock pages so the symbol travels through the entire portfolio.

A watercolor or other student artwork can appear through the opening. As the pages turn, the repeated shape connects one part of the experience to the next.

Possible Portfolio Sections

- Where We Went — map, route, dates, purpose, and first impressions
- Weather & Place — daily weather, habitat, tides, landscape, and environmental conditions
- Plants & Animals — identification, observations, tracks, shells, sketches, and data
- Science in the Field — measurements, tables, graphs, investigations, and conclusions
- History & Culture — museum notes, artifacts, people, places, and historical stories
- Art of the Trip — watercolors, sketches, photographs, poetry, and six-word memoirs
- Worship & Reflection — spiritual insights, creation connections, TAG/Sit Spot writing, and questions
- What I Carry Home — the student's final reflection

The finished book should look different from student to student because the experience was different for every student.

THE PORTFOLIO IS WHERE SUBJECTS MEET

A good field trip refuses to stay inside one subject area. The portfolio makes those connections visible.

A shell may begin as biology and become watercolor. A ferry may become transportation history, engineering, geography, and personal narrative. A horse may lead to ecology, history, behavior, and art. A museum artifact may connect archaeology with mathematics, writing, and questions about human life.

THE WISDOM

The real world does not divide itself into class periods. Neither should the best field learning.

Science

Students preserve observations, measurements, species information, field data, graphs, and evidence.

Mathematics

They use distance, scale, temperature, averages, rates, circumference, height, flow, and other quantitative information collected in the field.

History & Humanities

They preserve the stories of people, places, museums, artifacts, land use, and culture.

Language & Writing

They write captions, explanations, reflections, questions, narratives, and six-word memoirs.

Art

They use watercolor, sketching, photography, layout, color, and the cutout design to communicate meaning.

Faith & Reflection

They revisit worship experiences and moments in creation that raised questions about the Creator, stewardship, wonder, gratitude, and their own place in the world.

The portfolio does not merely prove that the student went somewhere. It shows what the student did with being there.

A TEACHER'S POST-TRIP CHECKLIST

- ☐ Give students time soon after returning to review their field notebooks.
- ☐ Have them circle, star, or mark observations they want to preserve.
- ☐ Gather field data, weather records, watercolors, photographs, maps, museum notes, and reflection pages.
- ☐ Help students distinguish raw notes from information that needs clarification or further research.
- ☐ Let each student choose a meaningful symbol for the cardstock cutout design.
- ☐ Require evidence from several dimensions of the trip: observation, data, art, history, and reflection.
- ☐ Encourage captions and explanations rather than pages filled only with pasted material.
- ☐ Make room for student choice. A portfolio should reveal the student as well as the trip.
- ☐ Include a final reflection: What did I notice? What did I learn? What changed because I went?
- ☐ Celebrate the finished work: display it, share it, revisit it, and let students tell the story behind their pages.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

You provided the place and the experience. Now help students turn experience into meaning.

Teacher Reflection

What happens to the learning materials after your field trips?

Do students have a reason to reopen their notebooks?

What could students create that would make the experience worth revisiting months—or years—later?

Words on the Trail

“Bring home more than memories. Bring home evidence of what you noticed.”

“The notebook caught the moment. The portfolio gives the moment a home.”

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

The field trip is not finished when the canoe is pulled from the water, the tent is packed, the trail ends, the museum doors close, or the bus returns to school.

Something has been gathered.

Students have gathered measurements and observations. They have gathered colors and sounds. They have gathered stories, questions, discoveries, worship thoughts, sketches, weather, data, and memories.

Now give them the opportunity to gather those pieces into something that lasts.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

Go somewhere. Observe deeply. Record honestly. Come home. Make something that lasts.

My Field Trip Wisdom Note

One piece of raw field data I want students to preserve is:

A symbol that could represent one of our trips on a portfolio cover is:

One way I can help students connect science, art, history, writing, and reflection is:

What do I want students still to remember years after this field trip?

My Six-Word Memoir

The trip ended. The learning didn't.

Take them places they have not been. Show them things they have not seen.

— Gordon Taylor Davis