



BLUE FIELD TRIP
GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



READY TO GO ON AN ADVENTURE?

We've teamed up with our friends at Common Seas and Plastic Clever Schools to help you plan your Blue Field Trip.

What's a Blue Field Trip? The Blue Field Trip is all about connecting young people to their local blue space, letting them experience the benefits of being around water and helping them realise that no matter where we live, everyone is connected to the ocean.

The good news is that, by signing up to the Our Blue platform, you've already identified your local blue space. Blue spaces are officially described as 'outdoor environments - either natural or manmade - that prominently feature water and are accessible to people'.

Here's what you'll find in this guide:

- Why a Blue Field Trip?
- Blue Mind theory
- Getting to your local blue space
- What to bring
- Risk assessment considerations
- Our Blue Activities
- Guide to litter picking from Plastic Clever Schools



WHY THE BLUE FIELD TRIP MATTERS

BLUE MIND THEORY

Being around, in or under the water causes a mindset shift towards calmness and creativity whilst restoring our connection to nature. Throughout his life, Dr Wallace J. Nichols researched the positive responses that being around water triggers in our brains. He named this Blue Mind and scientifically proved that being around water tells our brains it is safe to relax. The Blue Mind principle presents great, evidence-based benefits of the Blue Field Trip - spending time in local blue spaces will induce calmness and connection to nature.

Water puts your brain into a mildly meditative state - Nichols describes Blue Mind as a "mildly meditative state characterised by calm, peacefulness, unity, and a sense of general happiness and satisfaction" - triggered simply by being near, in, or on water.

It triggers a powerful neurochemical response - Being near water releases feel-good neurochemicals, including dopamine (pleasure and novelty), serotonin (well-being and peace), endorphins (euphoria), oxytocin (love and bonding), and GABA (calmness).

Stress hormones physically drop - Using CT, PET and MRI scans, researchers have shown that proximity to water increases levels of dopamine and oxytocin while simultaneously dropping levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, producing a measurable state of relaxation.

Your nervous system responds almost instantly - Simply seeing or hearing water activates the parasympathetic nervous system, the body's rest-and-recovery system, slowing your heartbeat, lowering blood pressure, and deepening your breathing.

It boosts creativity and problem-solving - Brain scans reveal increased activity in areas associated with empathy, creativity, and emotional regulation when people view water scenes, with the prefrontal cortex showing reduced activity, allowing other brain regions to become more active. This is why people often have creative insights or emotional breakthroughs near water.

Even brief exposure makes a measurable difference - One study found that observing an aquarium for at least 10 minutes can significantly lower blood pressure and heart rate, and research suggests that as little as 20 minutes by the water daily can reduce stress and improve overall wellbeing.



WHY THE BLUE FIELD TRIP MATTERS

WANT TO IMPROVE FOCUS AND REDUCE STRESS?

As educators, you are in a unique position to facilitate nature connection for your students. A blue field trip is the perfect opportunity to tap into the benefits of teaching outdoors. We loved reading about a recent study that highlights the benefits of teaching in outside spaces. A group of researchers have shown that delivering lessons outside will lead to improved student engagement, lowering of stress levels and reduced distractions.

The study measured the impact of outdoor learning instead of classroom-based learning on student focus and stress. In four London schools, the researchers replicated indoor workspaces in outside environments and delivered near-identical lessons in both spaces. They tracked a few key indicators over the course of four weeks; resting heart rate, amount of fidgeting and noise levels. Their results were pretty eye-opening:

Learning outdoors lowers resting heart rate - the study found that resting heart rate, a key indicator of stress, was significantly lower in lessons delivered outside. This was consistent across the four schools which suggests that regardless of the outside environment, simply the act of being outdoors for a lesson significantly lowers stress levels in students.

Lessons delivered outside result in less fidgeting - the students wore vests that tracked their micro level movements (fidgeting!). The results show, that for all students studied, levels of fidgeting reduced dramatically when being taught outside. Fidgeting is a key indicator of focus levels meaning children were more engaged with a lesson delivered outdoors than the same lesson indoors.

Classes are quieter outside - by recording noise levels in the middle of the group the researchers found that noise levels in outside classes were significantly lower than inside classes. Interestingly they also discovered a strong link between increased noise levels and higher resting heart rate which shows that louder learning environments cause greater stress in children.

Outdoor learning matters now, more than ever. In a single generation there has been a 50% reduction in the amount of time children are spending outside but as educators you have the power to change this.



PLANNING YOUR BLUE FIELD TRIP

GETTING TO YOUR LOCAL BLUE SPACE

Have a think about where your chosen blue space is in relation to your school. If it's close by, are there safe walking routes to get there? If it's a bit further away can you get public transport or arrange a minibus for your students? If you realise that getting to your chosen blue space is going to be difficult don't worry. It's not too late to pick another blue space closer to your school - remember that connection to water of any kind has benefits for your students.

WHAT TO BRING

What you bring with you on your blue field trip depends on where you are in the world and which activities you choose to do. However, there are some basic items that are useful for all blue field trips:

- Weather appropriate clothing
- Comfortable outdoor footwear
- Drinking water
- A smartphone or camera to take photos of your trip

RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to consider and mitigate the risks of a Blue Field Trip. Depending on where you are in the world, you might need to complete a written risk assessment - make sure you consider:

- Weather (and tide) conditions, is it safe to carry out the Blue Field Trip in all weather (and tide) conditions? If the weather changes do you need to change your itinerary to keep students safe?
- Supervision ratios: Do we have enough teachers and assistants for the number of students we are taking on the trip?
- Water exits. If a student were to fall into the water how would we get them out?
- Emergency contacts, if we have an emergency on our field trip, who do we need to call and what are their contact details?
- Accessibility, do we have students with additional needs, and how can we make the location accessible to them?
- Environmental hazards, are there any risks such as slippery rocks, drop-offs or dangerous wildlife, and have we made our students aware of them?
- Toilets and hygiene facilities, where are the closest facilities?



OUR BLUE ACTIVITIES

We've got loads of great ways for your students to connect to their local blue space during the Blue Field Trip. Check out our suggested activities below (you can do as many as you like!). You'll find downloadable lesson plans for all the activities in the [Our Blue hub](#).



Sit Spot: A simple but powerful nature connection exercise that helps create a sense of belonging in your local blue space.



Memory Map: A creative exercise that helps us develop a 'sense of place' - the meanings and emotions we connect to a particular place.



Action Plan: A class activity to design a plan to take care of your local blue space - whether it's a beach, lake, river, stream or canal.

WAYS TO BUILD ON YOUR BLUE FIELD TRIP ONCE YOU'RE BACK IN THE CLASSROOM



Deep Confidence: All our ocean heroes have deep confidence in their ability to make a difference. This worksheet will help explore four ways to build yours!



Marine Citizenship: Learn how we can all play an active part in keeping the ocean environment sustainable for generations to come.



Marine Identity: This quiz will help you learn more about your own values and how to use them to be a good blue human and help take care of our amazing ocean.



MORE ACTIVITY IDEAS

Go for a hike - Follow a route along a river, canal towpath, coastal path, or around a lake. Encourage students to notice how the landscape changes as they move through it - what lives here and what flows through.

Map your blue space's connection to the ocean - Even the most inland blue space is part of a network that ultimately connects to the sea. Challenge students to trace the journey - which river does this canal feed into? Where does this stream end up? Mapping these connections builds a sense of belonging to something much bigger than the local environment.

Make art using things you find outside - Land art, rubbings, sketches, photography - blue spaces offer endless creative inspiration. Using natural materials found on-site grounds the activity in place and builds a personal connection to the environment.

Deliver a normal lesson but in a blue space - Pick a lesson that benefits from a change of scene -science, geography, creative writing -and let the blue space do the rest.

Invite a local conservationist - Connect students to someone who knows and loves this place. A local conservationist, ranger, or community activist can bring the blue space to life in ways no classroom resource can.

Find a physical activity - Surfing, swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking, rock pooling - getting in or on the water deepens the connection in a way that standing on the bank simply can't. Even dipping your toes in counts!

Carry out a BioBlitz - A BioBlitz challenges students to identify and record as many species as possible in a set time. It builds observation skills, introduces biodiversity concepts, and often produces genuinely surprising results -you never quite know what's living in your local blue space until you look.

Do a clean-up - A litter pick is one of the most immediate ways students can take action for their local blue space. See our Guide to Litter Picking for everything you need to run one safely and well.



GUIDE TO LITTER PICKING



We've done our fair share of litter picks in the past. They're a great way to have an immediate impact on the plastic pollution in your neighbourhood, as it doesn't take long to see a big difference. However, it's important to be careful when picking up rubbish - sometimes there are items or places it is best to avoid. So, here are our top tips for staying safe while litter picking!

1. Think about your location - Rivers, canals, lakes, ponds, wetlands, coastlines, harbours - blue spaces take many forms, and almost all of them accumulate litter. What's collected on the bank or shore stays out of the water, directly protecting the ecosystems connected to it. Before you head out, think about the specific conditions of your chosen site.

Riverbanks can be slippery, tidal zones shift, and pond or lakeside edges may be soft underfoot. Check site-specific factors in advance, establish clear boundaries, and always ensure learners are supervised near the water's edge.

2. Be hygienic - While litter picking, you often find items that aren't particularly clean. Many times, the rubbish has sat there for so long that it's covered in dirt and bacteria - yuck! That's why it's super important to stay safe and healthy when picking up rubbish. Think about your gear - get hold of a litter picker and some thick gloves - you don't want to be using your bare hands. Always make sure you have a bottle of hand sanitiser in your pocket for when you're done!

3. Be careful what you collect! - Just imagine, you've finished picking up for the day, you've got a full bag of rubbish that you're taking to the bin and riiiiip! Your bag has split, and dropped everything back onto the floor. This is a nightmare scenario that's happened to us many times! To avoid it happening, don't pick up anything sharp (like shattered glass or needles). Not only are these items dangerous, but they're also far more likely to rip your bag open than an item like a plastic bottle. If something looks too gross (and trust me, you will find many strange things when picking up), then just leave it. It's better to be safe than sorry!

4. Work together - Try to keep an eye out for organised litter picks in your area. We've been on group litter picks before, where we've collected over 2,000 pieces in just one hour - such as one we did on a beach in Cardiff, Wales. You can pick up incredible amounts when working together!

Head to Plastic Clever Schools for more info about their incredible program - <https://plasticcleverschools.org>



ABOUT US

World Ocean Day for Schools provides educators with the inspiration, resources & activities to engage their students in more meaningful conversations about the ocean. Since its launch in 2018, World Ocean Day for Schools has focused on increasing ocean literacy in schools. We've evolved from a small-scale event with 400 schools to an interactive online festival with over 100k users. We're proud to be a UN Ocean Decade endorsed project.

In 2022, we launched Our Blue - a digital platform that enables schools to map their local blue space. We want kids to know they can be ocean advocates no matter where they live. We created activities that helped build a closer connection to their blue space, whether it was a beach, river, canal, stream or lake. We've collaborated with Dr Pamela Buchan, Research Fellow at the University of Exeter, to run a global experiment to capture data around marine identity, marine citizenship & connection to the ocean.

"World Ocean Day for Schools is a fantastic opportunity not only to explore the relationships people have with the sea, but also to understand how these relationships are formed in childhood. This is the first time that marine citizenship and what motivates it will be investigated in young people on a global scale. The data collected through this project will help researchers to better understand how marine citizenship can be promoted in all people."

Dr Pamela Buchan - Research Fellow, University of Exeter

