

Going Afield

"I wish we could take the students somewhere." "I wish we could use this English in a real situation." "I wonder how my students would react to a different environment using their English?" If you have ever thought something like this, then perhaps going on a field trip is for you! Putting the students' shopping-, animal-, neighborhood-, or even simple greeting-English into effect can be easy and fulfilling for both students and teachers. To give you some ideas, here three teachers relate their successful field trips and offer some advice for yours, plus one that ended well after an inauspicious start.

Talk to the Animals

My school is very small, so planning for my field trip was less complicated than it would be for most schools. We chose to go to a huge children's play park called *Kodomo no Kuni* since it is close enough to reach by train in about 30 minutes. The park has many things to do, but we had to limit our activities to the petting zoo and playground.

It's critical to visit the location first in order to make your plan for the field trip. Even if you've been there before, you need to consider it from a group leader's point of view. Choose meeting places, make note of bathroom locations, and plan your itinerary. If you choose to give your students some kind of task to accomplish along the way, consider this as well.

About one month before going, I handed out fliers to the students about the trip, listing all-important information: start and finish times;



items they needed to bring (handkerchief, lunch); and cost. The cost included park admission, round-trip train fare, and an ice cream cone. The four students who came with parents didn't need to pay in advance since our group was so small.

The purpose of this trip was to provide an opportunity for the kids to listen to and use English outside of the classroom. For example, children who usually remember to say "thank you" in class were always saying "*arigatou*" during the trip. I wanted to show them that English wasn't just a class! Of course a field trip is also a great PR opportunity. All the children had a blast, and happy students are the best advertising. By coincidence, some of the students ran into friends at the park and told them, "We're here with our English teacher!" In our case, most of the children were accompanied by both parents, which provided a chance for me to get to know the parents and vice versa.

We also went on pony rides, which hadn't been part of our original plan, but since only one child came without parents, we paid for her pony ride while the parents paid for their own children. Obviously, if there had been more unaccompanied children on the trip, the pony rides would not have been allowed.

I carried a small first-aid kit, but fortunately it wasn't needed. The only "disaster" was at the petting zoo, where we found the donkeys mating! I don't think the children noticed but it sure shocked the adults!

Don't forget to follow up afterwards! The students had to draw a picture of their favorite animal from the park as homework and tell me about it in the next class, and I put a collage of photos on the wall to talk about.

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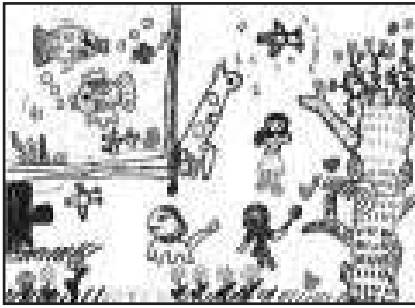
Going to the Zoo, Zoo, Zoo

Every year during summer vacation, my small English school has a special, all-day English event, one of five Saturday events that I hold throughout the year. In the past we have gone mountain climbing and put on a version of "Peter Pan", and this year we are going to be making child-sized puppets. One year that stands out is the year we went to the zoo. It was such a great event for everyone involved to go romping around there.

It is very important to know in advance where you are going and what you are to be doing throughout the day. To prepare, I made a preliminary visit to the zoo, checking out toilets, information, lunch areas, and alternate plans. I also made a booklet of questions, mazes, and coloring pages for the kids to keep as a souvenir. Pre-elementary students needed to be accompanied by their parents. Many of the parents offered the use of their cars, so transportation was not a difficult part of the preparation. Sixty of us shared cars. At the zoo, we met inside the main gate and children were assigned to groups named for animals. Each group included two adults, who had purple nametags for recognition and safety. A timetable was necessary, written out for each group, but just having a timetable doesn't mean that it will be followed. For example, the kids had almost two hours to reach the EFL goal-for-the-day of finding the 21 items in the booklet and then meet for lunch, but I eventually had to go searching for one group. Our time frame was set for 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., but we ended up going over.

We all ate our lunches on the grass and talked about the animals, checked how many groups had finished their questions, did the zoo mazes, and we even got to do a stamp rally that the zoo had going on at that time.

Some good points to consider or



things to take along:

1. Check beforehand to see if the place you are going to has any special events (stamp rally, etc.) going on the day of your trip.
2. Attending parents need a marker (such as a colored nametag); the kids are not to talk to anyone who doesn't have this marker.
3. Confirm parking, stroller rental, and entry fees, including for groups and students (who might need to show proof).
4. Use the buddy system.
5. A thank-you for the parents who helped and drove in the form of

a gratuity or gift.

6. Hats and drinks.
7. A first-aid kit.
8. A map and your cell phone number for all adults.
9. A megaphone and a flag.
10. Lunch; prepare for one or two forgetful kids.

Things for the kids to take along: I use a passport (same size, shape and manner as my Canadian one) for attendance and stickers; lunch, drink, and mat to sit on; pencil/eraser; weather-appropriate clothing; and a watch to keep track of time. You can find a lot of support on the web; I recommend www.abcteach.com. Search under "zoo."

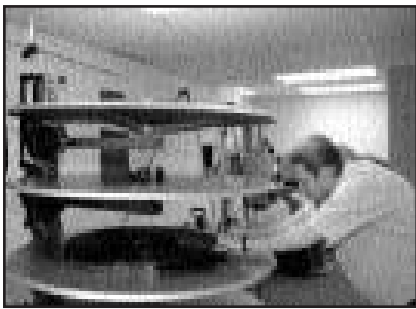
It was an event to remember, and I'm already looking forward to doing it again.

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A Trip to a British-Style Movie Theater

While shopping in the then-new Parco Department Store near our school seven years ago, my wife and I met the British manager of the seven-screen cineplex located in the building, and invited him to dinner. The manager was hired for the first six months to get the theaters functioning like movie theaters in England. Over dinner he told us that the layout and system of the cineplex were modeled after England's large, successful cinemas.

We got the idea of asking for a group discount to see a children's movie. At that time, the live-action movie "101 Dalmations" had just been released in Japan. We told the mothers about the plan only a few weeks before going and we asked them to pay for 50% of the ticket. However, because our group was small, the manager gave us all free



passes. We told the students they could not eat or drink at the theater, so they had to eat at home first. We took the children, a group of eight seven-year-olds, by train on the same afternoon that they always had their one-hour lessons. None of the students' parents attended.

Before seeing the movie, the British manager, who did not speak Japanese, asked each child his or her name and age and then he brought us into the projection room while other movies were showing. There was only one projection room for all seven theaters, with the movie projectors very close to one another. I was astounded by the enormous size of the film reels and projectors, and by the incredible winding path of the filmstrip through the huge machines. Seeing those fascinating machines in action and knowing that they were showing movies to many audiences at that moment must have been a very memorable experience for those children. I was surprised that the manager was willing to take the risk of allowing a group of such young children back there, but he seemed very eager about it. The manager told us some interesting information about the theater and projectors and my wife simultaneously translated

everything into Japanese for the children.

After that we watched the movie in English. There were subtitles but the students were too young to read them. It was nice that we got the young children to sit for an hour and a half and listen to English. They were very focused. We did have the option of seeing the Japanese-dubbed movie instead of English with subtitles, but of course that would not have served our purpose.

Although this trip was a total success, I would only do it again with well-behaved kids. I would be surprised if they let us in the projection room the next time, but it never hurts to ask!

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All work and no students

After showing all my classes the video "Finding Nemo" and teaching some key phrases, I decided to organize a field trip to the nearest aquarium to look for the creatures depicted in the movie. I thought this would be a great opportunity to put into practice what the students had been learning, and also to learn more about the ocean and its inhabitants. After a preliminary visit to the aquarium, I made a 12-page booklet for the trip with photos, mazes, quizzes, interesting fish facts, and coloring pages. I made button badges with Nemo characters, cloth bags out of Nemo material, and laminated bookmarks. I included a pencil, a Nemo handkerchief, and a snack. I worked hours and hours on the arrangements,

enjoying that as much as looking forward to all the happy, smiling faces I would see that day.

Too bad I was counting my chickens before they hatched. Originally I had planned to charter a bus, as I envisioned at least 50 or 60 people would attend, and it would be easier and feel more like a school trip. I invited not only my students but also their families and friends. I could only estimate the total fee as it depended on the number attending, so I first sent out a questionnaire to all my students asking if they could attend and if they would pay up to a certain cost. I got 47 responses, but 19 of those said they would only pay if 60 people attended, so we could not afford to go by bus.

Then I sent out another questionnaire asking about going by car and if parents would drive, as going by train would take too long. The cost was about half that of going by bus. I got a total of 5 students plus an additional 9 family members and friends. Including my daughter and husband, there were a total of 17, not enough to get a group discount, so I had to pay out more money to cover the costs.

We went and had a very good time as I knew we would, but after all of the hours and days of planning, I felt disappointed that I could not share my enthusiasm with more people. Because I had never arranged a trip by bus before, I did not know what to expect, but next time we'll just go by car.

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