

Exploring The Park



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Instructional Purpose and Goals Of The Program:

Exploring The Park is an inquiry-based study that integrates the areas of social studies, reading, writing, math, and art. This interdisciplinary program is used to teach students the concept of interdependence, specifically between the community and the park. While the students of P.S. 321 explore Brooklyn's Prospect Park, the study can be adapted to other parks including Manhattan's Central Park or London's Hyde Park.

The *big questions* that serve to focus and guide the study are:

- (1) What places can community members visit in the park?
- (2) Why are those places there?
- (3) How can the community support the park?

The *understandings* for the students to gain are:

- (1) The services of the park are important and available to all members of the community.
- (2) The services of the park fill the needs of the community.
- (3) The different services of the park are often connected.
- (4) The community can support the park by using it and caring for it.

Student Population:

Exploring The Park is a unit of study designed for any K-2 early-childhood classroom. Throughout the study, students are actively engaged in a variety of ways including partnerships, cooperative learning groups, and independent work. The program can be modified to meet the needs of all learners in a classroom through its multi-sensory approach and adaptable activities that involve and engage students of all ability levels.



Types Of Assessment Used:

Assessment of the students is ongoing, varied, and used to help guide the study. Examples of ways students are evaluated during the study include their ability to: generate relevant and appropriate interview questions, participate during interviews (speaking, listening, and note taking), collect and use data to share information about the park (through artwork, sketches, and writing), locate places on park maps, give a tour, and explain park-related activities and projects to adults during the culminating study celebration. Also, student enthusiasm and use of the park (including places visited by the class as well as many others located in the park) during non-school hours with their families is shared and recorded both during and after the study.



Timeline Of Exploring The Park:

WEEK	BIG IDEA	LESSONS	TRIPS
Week 1	Where Have You Been In The Park?	*Family Park Visits *File Covers	
Week 2	Geography; Reading and Making Maps	*Looking at Park Maps *Making Class Park Map *Map Keys *Determining Walking Trip Routes	
Week 3	Interviewing	*Writing Interview Questions *Taking a Trip *Transferring Data *Writing Thank-You Letters	*Trip to the Prospect Park Zoo
Week 4	Interviewing	*Writing Interview Questions *Taking a Trip *Transferring Data *Writing Thank-You Letters	*Trip to the Prospect Park Ice-Skating Rink



Timeline of *Exploring The Park*:

Week 5	Interviewing	*Writing Interview Questions *Taking a Trip *Transferring Data *Writing Thank-You Letters	*Trip to the Imagination Playground
Week 6	Interviewing	*Writing Interview Questions *Taking a Trip *Transferring Data *Writing Thank-You Letters	*Trip to the Architect's Office
Week 7	Making Murals	*Mural Groups and Blueprints *Sketching The Mural *Painting The Mural *Adding 3D Art	
Week 8	Park Labeling	*Writing Captions for Photographs of Park Trips *Writing Mural Labels	



Timeline of *Exploring The Park*:

Week 9	Research Writing	*Using Interview Data to Write A Piece About A Park Trip *Conferring and Editing Piece *Publishing Piece *Illustrating Piece	
Week 10	Study Celebration	*Hosting a Park Study Celebration for Families, Administrators, Park Workers	



Lesson Plans:

The lesson plans are grouped by week; changes in the number of lessons taught in a week can be made depending on the daily curriculum schedule of a classroom. (I typically taught between three and four lessons per week.) I used the workshop approach to teach the study, as I do for all the content areas. Each workshop (i.e., lesson) typically began with a mini-lesson linked to the previous lesson, followed by the students actively engaged in practicing the designated skill (i.e., lesson objective) and concluded with a student share.

Student involvement varied from one lesson to another with students alternating between working independently, in partnerships and in cooperative groups.

Week One: Where Have You Been In The Park?

Lesson 1: Family Park Visits

Time: 45 minutes

Advanced Preparation: completed park homework activity sheets

Objective: To share and record places students and families have visited in the park.

Materials: homework activity sheets, park book (see bibliography), chart paper, and markers



Description:

1. Begin the lesson by reading a park book, fiction or nonfiction, to generate student interest and awareness in the subject and class libraries of park texts. (Several baskets of books about parks, labeled "fiction park books" and "nonfiction park books," are displayed in the classroom. Students explore and read these books during the daily reading workshop. Students are encouraged to bring books from home to add to the classroom libraries.) After reading the book, have students discuss any park places that were mentioned in the text.
2. Have students share from their homework, places in the local park they have visited with their families. Comparisons can be made between places mentioned in the book and the student family experiences recorded on the homework activity sheets.
3. The teacher will record the family-visited park places on a class chart titled *"Places The Families of Class 226 Have Visited in Prospect Park."*
4. As students realize that many families visit the same places, the teacher will conduct a survey and the class will count to see how many families have visited each place listed on the chart. (Individual students will be invited to record the numeral amount and then the tall amount for each place listed on the class chart.)
5. Conclude the lesson with a discussion on park places students feel the class should visit and interview an employee.



Lesson 2: Park Study File Covers

Time: 30 minutes

Advanced Preparation: class set of study files (I use file folders and print the title of the study on the cover.)

Objective: To decorate the park-study file cover.

Materials: study file, pencils, and crayons

Description:

- 1. Distribute a file study to each student.**
- 2. Each student chooses a place previously visited in the park, sketches and colors the illustration.**
- 3. Conclude the lesson with students sharing their work (in partnerships or whole class) and describing their park illustrations.**

***** Throughout the study, all activity sheets (i.e., homework assignments, interview sheets, and maps) are stored in the individual student park study files.**



Week Two: Geography; Reading and Making Park Maps

Lesson 3: Looking At Park Maps

Time: 30 minutes

Advanced Preparation: several class sets of park maps

Objective: To notice similarities and differences between park maps.
To practice finding places on park maps.

Materials: class sets of park maps, chart paper

Description:

1. Put students in partnerships. (Maps are often challenging for students to use and read; working in partnerships will lessen frustration.)
2. Distribute to each partnership a map. (All partnerships are viewing identical maps.) Allow for student exploration and observations about things they see on the map. Encourage partnerships to find specific places on the map. Share observations about helpful things that are found on maps (i.e., words, pictures, numbers, and map keys.)
3. Distribute a second map of the park to each partnership. Encourage partnerships to find the same places on the second map. Engage in discussion about how the first and second maps are the same and different. Teacher can record observations on a class chart.



4. If time permits, repeat the above process and discussion with a third park map.
5. Conclude the lesson by reviewing the class observations recorded on the chart. Encourage students to bring to school any maps found around their home of the park and other places.

Lesson 4: Making A Class Park Map

Time: 60 minutes

Advanced Preparation: wall-sized poster map of the park

Objective: To decide what places should go on the class map.
To illustrate each place.
To decide where places should be put on the map.

Materials: wall-sized park map, sets of park maps, pencils, scissors, crayons, tape, and white paper

Description:

1. Gather students in a circle around the wall-sized map. (Explain that it is the same shape as the park they are studying but right now it is empty.) Ask the students what places they think the class should include on the class park map. (Encourage students to look at the previously studied park maps, the chart of places class families have visited, etc., to get ideas for the class map.)



2. Have the class brainstorm the most important places to include on the map. Teacher can record responses on a chart.
3. Students choose from the chart one of the places to illustrate and put on the map (i.e., ice rink, long meadow, playground, and baseball fields). Students may choose to work in partnerships or work independently.
4. On white paper, students draw a pictorial representation of the place and label it as well. Students will need help in determining the size of the item they are drawing. (I sometimes pre-cut the white drawing paper to resemble the shape and size of the object/building/place they are drawing.)
5. Gather the class around the empty park map which is laid on the floor for all students to see. Students take turns deciding where their map place belongs on the class map. Students should be encouraged to look at the previously studied park maps so they can determine where their object should be placed on the map.
6. Conclude the lesson with the class discussing why the specific placement of objects on a map is important and should not be done randomly.

Lesson 5: Map Keys

Time: 45 minutes

Advanced Preparation: students map and map key activity sheets

Objective: To make and read a map key for a park map.



Materials: wall-sized park map, pencils, crayons, and activity sheets

Description:

1. Begin the lesson with the class gathered around the wall-sized park map. Review the places the class illustrated and placed on the map. Explain that each student is going to have his/her own “mini” version of the class wall-sized map.
2. Distribute to each student a mini version of the class map. (Each of the places on the class map is represented by an outlined shape on the student copy.) Explain to the children that rather than draw each place, they are going to color in the representative shapes by creating a map key.
3. Have students refer to the second activity sheet, the map key.
4. The teacher will choose one place put on the class wall map to begin (i.e., the ice skating rink). Students will locate the rink on the class map and then find the matching shape on their smaller map. A color will be chosen for that shape, students will color in the rink shape as well as the color key box (i.e., a red shape indicates the ice skating rink).
5. The class will repeat the above process for each map object. (A different color will be used for each map object.)
6. Conclude the lesson with students reading the map key and using its color key to help find places on the park map.



Lesson 6: Finding Walking Routes to Park Places

Time: 20 minutes

Advanced Preparation: park maps

Objective: To use a map to find a walking route to places in the park.

Materials: laminated sets of park maps, dry-erase markers

Description:

1. Explain to the class that they will be taking several walking trips to the park to interview a variety of park employees. The class must determine where those places are in the park and how to get there by foot.
2. Students can work in partnerships, using a park map and dry-erase marker to find a walking route to a particular park place. (I usually do this lesson before each walking trip to the park. Therefore the focus is specific with students all looking for a route to the place the class will be visiting the following day.) Students can use the marker to trace the best route.
3. Conclude the lesson with partnerships sharing their routes. Encourage students to debate and discuss the possibility of several routes to one given place.



Weeks Three, Four, Five and Six: Interviewing

I repeat the following four lessons over the next four weeks as the students take trips to the park to interview four park workers. I use a contact sheet to schedule the interviews. It typically takes several weeks to get interviews and willing candidates organized, so plan ahead.

Lesson 7: Writing Interview Questions

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: To develop a focused interview question that requires more of a response than a yes/no question.

Materials: student activity sheets, pencils, and class chart

Description:

1. Gather students and explain that their first park trip will be to the park zoo to interview the zookeeper. Have the class brainstorm things they expect to see at the zoo.
2. Assign each student an interview partner.
3. Distribute interview sheets to students and encourage them to brainstorm and record an interesting and appropriate question. Remind them to avoid asking yes/no questions.
4. Conclude the lesson with partnerships sharing questions. Classmates can help partnerships decide if their question is appropriate, requiring more of a response than yes/no. Teacher will record each question on a chart.



Lesson 8: Taking A Trip; The Interview

Our walking trips usually took several hours. It was a great way to get the students exercising. After each interview, we toured the facility and had a picnic lunch in the park meadow.

Time: 30 minutes (interview) + 30 minutes (tour)

Objective: To read a question and record the response.

Materials: clipboards, pencils, interview sheets, and camera

Description:

1. Before leaving on a trip, partnerships should practice reading their interview question for reading fluency.
2. In a designated order (organized by the teacher), partnerships ask their question and record the response. (First-graders have varied writing abilities and are encouraged to note-take using words and pictures.) Each partnership is therefore only responsible for recording the response to their question.
3. Conclude the interview with additional questions and a sketch of the interviewed adult.



Lesson 9: Transferring Data

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: To share and transfer interview notes to a class chart.

Materials: class chart of interview questions, Post-Its, pencils,
and interview sheets

Description:

1. Student partnerships transfer their interviewed data from their recording sheet to a Post-It and place it on the class chart by their pre-recorded question.
2. Class gathers around the chart and each partnership shares their interview data.
3. Conclude the lesson by partnerships discussing their previous night's homework, which was a trip-reflection activity sheet.

Lesson 10: Thank-You Letters

Time: 45 minutes

Objective: To write a thank-you letter using proper letter format.

Materials: writing paper, pencils, crayons, and chart paper

Description:

1. Gather students around the chart and explain that they will each be writing a thank-you letter to the zookeeper/person interviewed.



2. Brainstorm a list of ideas they could write about in their letters (i.e., animals they saw on the zoo tour, something they learned from the zookeeper).
3. Review with students the proper letter format (i.e., date, opening, body, and closing) by engaging students in a shared writing experience of writing a sample letter on chart paper.
4. Students each write a thank-you letter. Students edit their pieces.
5. Students confer either with the teacher or with their writing partner.
6. Students illustrate their letters.
7. Conclude the lesson with the class walking to the postal office and mailing the envelope of letters.



Week Seven: Making Murals

Lesson 11: Mural Groups and Blueprints

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: To choose a mural cooperative learning group.
To draw a blueprint of a mural in a small group.

Materials: white paper, pencils, and chart paper

Description:

1. Gather students together. Explain that the class will be divided into small groups with each group making a mural of one of the places the class visited in the park (i.e., zoo, rink, playground, meadow, and picnic house).
2. Have class brainstorm the places they visited in the park. Teacher will record the list on chart paper.
3. Each student will choose a group to work with. Students can sign their names next to the group on the chart paper.
4. Distribute paper and a workspace to each group. The group must discuss what should be included on their mural. Each group must sketch and label a blueprint (use 8 1/2" by 11" drawing paper).
5. Conclude the lesson with each group sharing their blueprint.



Lesson 12: Sketching The Mural

Time: 45 minutes

Advanced Preparation: large mural paper

Objective: To use a blueprint to sketch a wall-sized park mural.

Materials: blueprints, mural paper, and pencils

Description:

1. Student gather in their small groups around their mural paper.
2. Groups work cooperatively to sketch their mural.
3. Groups label the color paints that will be used for each section of the mural.
4. Conclude the lesson by group members deciding who will paint each section of the mural.

Lesson 13: Painting The Mural

Time: 60 minutes

Advanced Preparation: paper cups filled with paints, newspaper covered workspaces

Objective: To paint a park mural.



Materials: paint, brushes, murals, art smocks, and newspaper

Description:

1. Gather groups around their murals and distribute paint materials.
2. Students work in cooperative groups painting the mural.
3. Conclude the lesson by group members discussing what 3-D art could be added to their mural the following day.

Lesson 14: Adding 3-D Art to Murals

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: To add three-dimensional artwork to murals.

Materials: scissors, glue, colored paper, and murals

Description:

1. Cooperative groups work together using colored paper to create three-dimensional artwork (i.e., objects like a sun or a picnic table) that is glued to the mural.
2. Conclude the lesson with each group sharing their completed mural with the class.

***Teacher will display the park murals. (I hung them in the hallway so everyone could view them as well as needing the extra space to display them.)

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Week 8: Labeling Places In The Park

Lesson 15: Writing Captions For Photographs

Time: 30 minutes

Advanced Preparation: teacher took and developed a series of photos on each park trip, and mounted them on construction paper

Objective: To label each photograph using park knowledge.

Materials: white labels, pencils black Sharpie pens, and photo posters

Description:

1. Distribute a photo poster and writing materials to each partnership.
2. Partners discuss and write a label for each photograph using their knowledge about the park. (I have students write with pencil first and then trace over with the permanent black Sharpie pens.)
3. Conclude the lesson with partnerships sharing with the class their park photo captions.

***Teacher will display the photo posters in the classroom.



Lesson 16: Writing Mural Labels

Time: 30 minutes

Objective: To write sentence strip labels for murals.

Materials: painted murals, sentence strips, pencils, black Sharpie pens

Description:

- 1. Students work in cooperative groups to write labels for their murals on sentence strips.**
- 2. Groups record a mural title, list of the artists, and several sentences explaining what is shown in their mural. (I have students write with pencil first, edit, and then trace over with the black Sharpie pens.)**
- 3. Conclude the lesson by having students tape their sentence strips next to their displayed mural.**



Week Nine: Research Writing

Lesson 17: Using Interview Data To Write An Informational Piece

Time: 60 minutes

Objective: To use data gathered and shared to write an informational piece about a park person/place visited.

Materials: class charts, interview sheets, writing paper, pencils,
And chart paper

Description:

1. Gather students and explain that each one will be choosing one person the class interviewed to write an informational piece about.
2. Students choose the person for their individual piece.
3. Teacher engages students in a shared writing experience of a sample informational piece on chart paper. The teacher will demonstrate how information can be taken from the class charts, student information sheets, homework reflective trip sheets, etc.
4. Students will write their pieces. (I usually have several writing workshops where students spend time writing this piece.)
5. Conclude the lesson with several students sharing their piece.

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Lesson 18: Conferring and Editing The Informational Piece

Time: 45 minutes

Objective: To edit the informational piece with an editing partner.

Materials: writing pieces, pencils, writing paper, and editing checklists

Description:

1. Students work with writing partners on editing their written pieces, focusing specifically on the skills listed on the checklists.

Lesson 19: Publishing Informational Pieces

Time: 45 minutes

Objective: To copy over the informational writing piece.

Materials: writing paper, pencils, and rough drafts

Description:

1. Students will work independently to copy over their final-draft informational piece.
2. Conclude the lesson with students sharing their pieces with partners.



Lesson 20: Illustrating Informational Pieces

Time: 45 minutes

Objective: To draw a portrait of the informational park worker.

Materials: crayons, craypas, pencils, and white drawing paper

Description:

1. Students sketch and color a portrait of the interviewed park worker they are writing the informational piece about. (I mount each written piece and portrait on large sheets of construction paper for display and viewing purposes.)



Week 10: Study Celebration

Lesson 21: Celebration Invitations

Time: 45 minutes

Objective: To make a celebration invitation for families, administrators, and park workers.

Materials: paper, pencils, and crayons

Description:

1. Students make invitations for the park celebration, including the key information of date, time, place, etc.
2. Invitations are distributed to class families, school administrators, and park workers interviewed.

Culminating Activity: Park Study Celebration

I end the study with a celebration. Guests are invited for an hour to our classroom. We begin by singing park songs we have learned. Students then guide guests on a tour around the classroom, in the outside hallway, and at their seats where work and projects are displayed. Guests record comments about the work on the comment sheets, which always serve as a great ego booster for all children. The celebration ends with juice and treats.



Sample Student Activity Sheets:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Prospect Park Social Studies Homework

This week we began our study of Prospect Park. Tonight you and your family should write down all the places you have visited in the park. We will share our work tomorrow in class.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

*** Please send in any family photos taken in the park. We will be displaying them in our classroom during our park study. Thank you! ***

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Prospect Park Map Key

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

*****Note:** This map key is used for a class park map that has ten places drawn and labeled on it. It can be modified.

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Interviewing Questions

Soon we will be interviewing Shauna, the zookeeper at Prospect Park Zoo.

Here is the question my partner and I will ask Shauna about the zoo:

Here is what she said:

My partner's name is _____

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Social Studies Trip Homework Reflection

Today we went to the Prospect Park Zoo and interviewed Shauna the zookeeper.

1. Write two things you learned about the zoo from our interview.

2. Write three animals you saw on our tour of the zoo.

3. Draw a picture of your favorite part of our trip to the zoo. Label your picture please. (Please use the back for more space.)

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Imagination Playground Trip Sheet

Draw a map of the playground. Draw the different things you see--like the wooden performance stage, statues, equipment, and trees. Label the objects you see.

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Class 1-226
Is Having
A Social Studies Park Celebration!

When: Thursday, December 20th
8:40-9:30AM

Where: Room 226

Why: To share our amazing work on Prospect Park

For: Families, Friends, Administrators, Park Guests

Please join us for juice and treats, too!

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Social Studies Celebration of Class 226's Park Study

Please show your family and our other guests all of your wonderful park work. You can look at your mural, park file, interview portrait and writing, labeled photographs, and charts and maps around the classroom and library. Have the grown-ups write their name and comments below about your work.

Name

Comment



Resources:

People/Field Trips: The essential resource for the study is the park staff. I initially met with the two heads of the park education department. They provided a telephone directory of staff members who were willing to be involved in the study in a variety of ways including being interviewed, giving tours, donating maps, etc.

I specifically chose the following park staff members for our study.

- (1) Shauna, the zookeeper, who was interviewed by the students and led a tour of the habitat buildings and animal nature trail.
- (2) Margaret, the ice rink manager, who was interviewed by the students and led a tour of the outdoor rink, skate rental shop, concession area, and nearby pond area.
- (3) Jennifer, the cultural arts program director of the Imagination Playground, who was interviewed by the students in the classroom after we had visited the playground. The interview specifically focused on the use of the playground's performance stage and animal mask figures.
- (4) Christian, the landscape architect of the Imagination Playground, who was interviewed by the students, specifically about the unusual play equipment, the statues of the Ezra Jack Keats story characters Willie and Peter and the overall playground theme, design, and organization.

In addition to the park staff members who were clearly central to our study, we also gathered information from community members we encountered on our walking trips, who were using the park in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. Furthermore, our class families were involved throughout the study as chaperones, frequent users of the park (during non-school hours), participants of the homework assignments, and guests at our study celebration.



Prospect Park Website: www.prospectpark.org

Prospect Park Expo: One very helpful resource I used when I was planning and developing my study was the annual Park Expo in the fall, which I attended. The Expo was designed specifically for educators, demonstrating how to use the park in a study.

Equipment: camcorder, camera, and tape recorder (to videotape, record, and photograph the interviews and trips)

Consumable Materials: student activity sheets, art and writing supplies (paints, colored paper, sentence strips, water colors, pencils, crayons, glue, scissors, writing paper, staplers, etc.)

Program Cost: The cost of the program was minimal. The only park service that required an admission fee was the zoo (for \$.50 per student). We walked to the park for every visit, and thereby avoided transportation fees. We collected park books from local libraries as well as the school library. The school and class families provided and donated the necessary art supplies as well as the treats for the class celebration at the end of the study.



Bibliography:

Teacher Resource: *Classroom Interviews* by Paula Rigovin
(This is an excellent book on how to teach students to generate interview questions, conduct an interview, record interview notes, and use interview data in a meaningful and purposeful way.)

Student Literature: A sample of books used as read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading texts is listed below.

Park Study Books

A Park for All People by the Prospect Park Alliance
The Park Bench by Fumiko Takeshita
A Long Walk by Miriam Frost
Signs by Fay Robinson
What's In A Park? by Betsey Chesson and Pamela Chenko
All About Maps by Catherine Chambers
Carousel by Pat Cummings
What's Your Favorite Flower? by Allan Fowler
It Could Still Be A Tree by Allan Fowler
Zoo by Gail Gibbons
My First Visit to the Zoo by J.M. Paramon and G. Sales
The Park Book by Charlotte Zolotow
When Autumn Comes by Robert Maas
Why Do Leaves Change Color? by Betsy Maestro
Maple Trees by Marcia S. Freeman
The Tree by Scholastic, Discovery Series
Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf by Lois Ehlert



Author Study Books: by Ezra Jack Keats

(In conjunction with our study of the park's Imagination Playground where the Willie and Peter character statues are displayed along with a plaque in honor of Ezra Jack Keats, who is a resident of Brooklyn.)

Goggles

A Letter To Amy

The Snowy Day

Maggie And The Pirate

Whistle For Willie

Over In The Meadow

Hi, Cat!

Pet Show!

Apt. 3

Jennie's Hat