

# Summertime Fun Makes a Better Teacher

Summer vacation is here! Time to get out and enjoy what the world has to offer. Some of us will hike in a national park, others will visit ancient ruins, or maybe a garden will get started in a backyard. Perhaps a new craft will be learned in a workshop. It is our time to see, do, create, and learn. While we are out gathering experiences, we are gaining valuable background knowledge to share with students. I remember early in my career being told that the more experiences a teacher has, the better a teacher they will be. When you can offer first-hand stories and facts, students will view your words and lessons more favorably.

We shouldn't constantly be thinking about work on our down time, but I'm sure you have been out with your family at an attraction and picked up something for a lesson—a book, a postcard, a copy of a historical document. A souvenir fossil from the gift shop might be just the thing for a third grade lab on rocks. A cookbook related to the travels of a wagon train can tell students what food was eaten and how it was prepared on the trip. While replacing a ceiling light fixture, you might pick up background knowledge that helps you understand circuits better. Perhaps while hiking in a valley you see evidence of erosion and the steps humans have taken to slow the process.

So, this summer, why not be more mindful of what you see and do and make your life easier next school year? Get out there and experience all you can. Be curious and learn.

## Travel Pictures

To get started, think about the lessons where you would love to have photos or videos to enhance students' understanding. Perhaps there's an artifact (or replica) to touch and examine that would hook your students. For my school, I could use photos or videos that show animal and plant adaptation, simple machines used in the real world, and more knowledge of why people move and settle in various areas near our town and around the country. Read through the science and social studies standards that guide the learning at your school. Jot down broad topics or type the list on your phone. When on vacation, keep an eye open for opportunities!

Pictures and videos are the easiest to collect. Cell phones take great pictures. I wear a knapsack while hoofing around on my trips, so I even have an iPad to take pictures and record. Being a reader, I tend to read all the signs, plaques, and information boards around me. It drives my family crazy, but you learn more about the place you are visiting. I have taken pictures of these signs in order to remember the information. I also pick up pamphlets for their pictures and information.

I love to hike, bike, and visit historical sites. When my family travels, I search our destination for parks of all kinds; national parks, state parks, and trails. This is where I encounter science concepts at their best and increase my background knowledge of standards such as forces and motion, waves, ecosystems and the interdependent relations that exist in that habitat, adaptation, the history of the Earth, weather and climate, natural resources, and the impact of humans on the environment. Because many of the parks were first homesteads, I also learn about the history and culture of the people of the area, the development of the community, and many times, how government works—social studies themes in the real world.

## Souvenirs

Soil Samples



While out in nature I can pick up artifacts: rocks that show they are made of sand, silt, and all kinds of matter, a shell or seed that can be inspected for how it helps animals in its habitat. I have soil samples from all across the United States. First graders love to sift the samples, examine the particles, and determine how they are alike and different. Some areas, however, do not allow you to remove items from their premises. Be aware of the rules and guidelines of the places you are visiting.

Cheap artifacts, such as copies of important historical documents, may be found in gift shops. Replicas of articles from the past might include aprons, hats, or simple tools. I have discovered that paper dolls can be a cheap way to have examples of clothing. Coloring books of historical houses might show students tools, toys, and furnishings from a different time period.

My favorite thing to pick up is a map. I collect maps of all kinds. We make multiple stops at rest areas along interstates so I can pick up state maps. Well, I might have an alternative reason for stopping at rest areas! I go into city visitor centers and pick up their maps. At both places, you can find pamphlets and maps of tourist destinations. I also keep maps of the parks and museums we visit. Gauging from their reactions, students think amusement park maps are the best!

## Local Sites

You really don't have to go far for new experiences. Ironically, we never visit the places around us. Take time this summer to investigate local museums and historical sites. Does your county have a historical society? Are you close to your state historical society? Social studies standards involve local history, civics, and economy. A visit to your city or county visitor center will give you ideas of places to go locally. Ask if there are walking tours with guides, audiotapes, or pamphlets. Don't forget to ask about different types of maps they offer. At my local visitor center, I picked up maps of fun places to visit, trails in my county, and a map that shows the growth of our town by neighborhood.

I have a list of pictures I would like to take of our city for social studies while out and about this summer. I need pictures of local businesses that sell goods and services. I'll keep an eye out for unique businesses the kids may not know about. I could also use some pictures of the water treatment plant, trash and recycling facilities, sewage treatment, city hall, and other civic departments. This is starting to sound like work, not summer vacation! I have a plan though. I am inviting friends on a walk around downtown to shop at the boutiques and a lunch date. Another time, I'll invite them on a visit to a new restaurant that will just happen to pass by the water treatment plant. There are many new restaurants where I live, so I think I can use this excuse quite a few times.

## Learning

Increasing background knowledge can be accomplished many ways. Attending talks by the county historian or listening to local storytellers can add a richness to your knowledge. Check the entertainment section of your newspaper for events. Of course, you should also check your local public library offerings. They often invite travelers and local authors to speak.

While we're talking about the public library, see if they offer workshops from experts. The public library in the town where I teach has opened up a makerspace. The opportunities are mind boggling! They have 3D printers, a laser engraver, and a vinyl cutter. They even offer certification classes to teach you how to use the equipment. Kits can be checked out to teach yourself calligraphy, jewelry making, painting, and more. They provide pottery wheels, sewing machines, and a fully functioning audiovisual studio. You can work alongside an artist with their maker-in-residence program. The goal isn't always to become an expert, but rather to increase skills and awareness. Now I am better equipped to help kids when they are making in our school library. Participating in these activities can also inspire ways to integrate designing, building, and making into lessons and units.

Art and craft classes and workshops might be offered all over your town or city. Once again, read the local paper looking for opportunities. Search the Web for offerings nearby. Class topics might include gardening, soap making, and even woodworking at your local hardware store. Check nearby zoos or museums for adult events. You never know what you will find.

## At Home

Frankly, if I'm curious enough about how to do something, I don't need to leave my house. I enjoy hunting for an online video and figuring out how to do it myself. Installing a ceiling fan and connecting the circuit, sparked an idea for the electricity lab I do with fourth graders. After making a simple and parallel circuit, I give students a motor, old Christmas lights, a variety of wires, and other building items and let them create. Working in my garden, gave me the idea to collect seeds for a second grade exploration. Repurposing furniture makes me curious about how I can give my students everyday experiences with tools and repair within the curriculum. And, installing a garbage disposal confirmed my belief that some things are better left to the pros!

## Don't Stop There

Be sure to get your school community involved. Let staff and parents help you gather materials. This is how I have added dirt, rocks, and maps from all over the country to my collection.

Firsthand experiences allow a deeper understanding of the natural and human world. This gives us a rich background knowledge and a passion to explore that we can pass on to our students. So, let your curiosity get the better of you this summer and get out and explore.

## About the Author

**Penny Patterson**, MLS, is a library media specialist at Hinkle Creek Elementary School in Noblesville, IN. She received her master's degree from Indiana University. You can follow her on Twitter @hclmcpat.

COPYRIGHT 2019 ABC-CLIO, LLC

## MLA Citation

Patterson, Penny. "Summertime Fun Makes a Better Teacher." *School Library Connection*, July 2019, [schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Display/2208183](https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Display/2208183).

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Display/2208183?topicCenterId=1945911>

Entry ID: 2208183