

# **The Whole Creation- A Classroom**

(a case for frequent fieldtrips)

by John Kalsbeek

It's a cold blustery morning in late January. The fourth and fifth graders are warmly dressed in their winter coats. They each carry a suitcase in their hand and anxiously await the announcement allowing them to board flight 283, bound for San Francisco, CA; Honolulu, Hawaii; and Sydney, Australia. For many of them it's their first flight. Most of them have never been away from home for more than two or three days and this trip will last two weeks. Their anticipation is therefore mingled with just a little bit of anxiety. Twenty-seven ten and eleven year olds, two teachers with their spouses and three sets of parents — thirty-seven in all, hear the announcement to board and hurriedly say final good-bys before embarking on this grand adventure—this once in a lifetime excursion.

The Boeing 747 lumbers down the runway with a surge of power, does the necessary wheely, familiar to all fourth and fifth graders who ride bikes, and is suddenly airborne.

The flight from Chicago takes four hours, but when they arrive in San Francisco they notice that it's only ten o'clock. Those who have watches see that their watches show twelve o'clock instead of ten o'clock. A similiar discrepancy occurs when they drop down in Hawaii for a much needed night of sleep. What's happening anyway? And, oh! how warm and sunny it is! "Why did we take our winter coats along anyway?" is on everyone's mind. Where is all the snow and ice?

Breakfast the next morning with bowls of sweet mouthwatering pineapple and fruit is enjoyed by all. Seven o'clock Hawaii time but twelve o'clock noon, Grand Rapids time, they again become airborne.

Once in the air, the loud speaker suddenly introduces Captain Joseph McClendon with the announcement that the plane is now flying over the International Date Line. Those who sit by the windows look down and see nothing but the blue Pacific Ocean. With questions in their eyes they look up again to their teacher or one of the parents.

Finally after tedious hours of monotonous sitting, the announcement is heard to "Please fasten your seatbelts, we are approaching

Kingsford Smith International Airport; Sydney, Australia." Within minutes land is sighted and the beautiful city of Sydney is spread out below. The plane suddenly banks to the right, levels off and lands smoothly on the two and a half mile-long runway. At last — Sydney, Australia. It's summer and it's unbelievably warm.

The itinerary included trips to Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, and Canberra, the capital.

In Brisbane, the children learned that it was one of Australia's chief ports for the exporting of wheat, wool, and dairy products. A visit to the wharves and a special tour of a large ocean ship were the highlight of the day.

Melbourne was a city of beautiful parks and flowers. Here they toured the State Library of Victoria and an automobile plant.

The capital city of Australia is Canberra. Here they visited the Parliament house and were told in a simple presentation how the Australian government works.

In Sydney, the world travelers were given a guided tour of the Sydney Opera House built on a piece of land jutting out into the harbor and a trip to the top of Australia's tallest building found here in Sydney — the Australia Square Tower. Here also a few hours were spent in the Royal Botanic Gardens in order to learn about Australia's beautiful variety of plants.

They were also treated to a visit of a large sheep ranch in New South Wales and a trip to a zoo.

With their days filled with exciting tours, the time passed all too swiftly and the two weeks were over seemingly before they even started. Even the most timid were amazed that the time had passed so swiftly. They had been too busy even to be homesick.

The uneventful return trip finds them all happily reunited with their families at O'Hare Field in Chicago. Many are the experiences and sights to tell to envious brothers and sisters and to interested parents.

An unrealistic dream trip, an impossibility financially? Certainly, I readily concede.

Yet the educational benefits of such an excursion would be immeasurable. To compare the learning accomplishments and experiences of a two-week field trip with a two-week classroom unit on Australia surely demonstrates graphically the value of the field trip.

The whole earth is the Lord's, the cattle on a thousand hills, the ants of the field, the coney in the rocks, the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, and the oceans, the way of the eagle in the air, all is the work of His hand. All reveal the glory of the Lord. In all of His creation we

see His handiwork. He displays before our feeble, often non-seeing eyes the beauty of His holiness. We see His wisdom and glory revealed even in the works of man — in his inventions, in the cities he builds, in the institutions he sets up. Although these are often set up as monuments to glorify man, yet God gives to man the intellect and ability to do seemingly wondrous and even miraculous things.

The whole creation is God's classroom. An important means of gaining knowledge that helps us learn about our Creator is to study His creation. Undoubtedly, much valuable knowledge can be imparted to students in the confines of the four walls of the classroom. Yet how much more beneficial is firsthand, on-the-spot, observation and experience.

A good thoroughly planned field trip can accomplish this important objective more effectively and often more meaningfully than a book or a dedicated teacher can do in the classroom.

A field trip is an educational endeavor. It is not and must never become just a "skip day" of school activity for students and teachers. Field trips must always be learning experiences for the student.

One of the best, most effective and interesting ways to learn about insects is to take a class of children into the outdoors to look for and identify the insect life that exists and is found in the field.

A good way, if you live in California, to learn about the desert, the ocean and/or the mountains is to spend a day with the class looking for the variety of animal and plant life that lives in each niche in God's creation. Then the things that were talked about in class come alive and become real.

In the classroom, basically two and only two senses are used in learning and those, of course, are seeing and hearing. And in the classroom the effectiveness of using even these two senses is severely limited. The student may hear a teacher or record tell about a particular natural habitat but he cannot actually hear the sounds made by the animals living in that particular locale. The same is true in regard to seeing.

When the children are taken on a field trip all of their senses come into use. They can see the actual land forms, the variety of plants and hopefully some of the animal life. They can hear the sound of the wind, the songs of the birds, the rustle in the leaves made by the squirrel scampering to his hideout. They can smell the pungent odors of the various plants and taste ripe berries in season. They can feel the textures of the bark of different trees and the softness of loose feathers. Thus God in His creation is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. God, the Creator — God, the all-wise sustainer of all His creatures — is forced into the minds and consciences of His little children.

Field trips are an indispensable part of a student's education. They can fall into a number of different categories or subject areas.

Field trips that can be taken in connection with science studies would include those mentioned earlier. Others could be a trip to the zoo, the museum, an arboretum, an aquarium, a planetarium, a boat ride to see whales. (This one, of course, is possible only along the east or west coast. We did this with the Redlands' school children and we were all thrilled to see spouting whales and a host of other marine animals which included seals, porpoises, a shark, pelicans, and sea gulls.)

Field trips can and should be taken in connection with social studies. These trips could be taken to a chicken farm, a milking parlor, a restaurant, a post office, a hospital, an animal hospital, a newspaper publishing firm, an airport, to name just a few.

Field trips to listen to symphony orchestras in concert or to an art museum might just fit in with a music or an art course.

The possibilities for field trips are endless. Your only real limitation is the region in which you live. Most business places welcome tour groups and have a staff of experts prepared to conduct groups so as to show them and explain to them the interesting aspects of their business.

Sometimes field trips can be expensive. The trip we took last year in Redlands to the San Diego Wild Animal Park cost \$8.00 per student. It was one of the best field trips I've even been on and well worth the expense. It was a trip that took us behind the scenes where ordinary visitors just are not allowed. We had a special guide who took us into the animals' kitchen where the food was prepared, into the lion's bedroom, to the barns where the food was stored, etc. She told us about the future plans for the park and about the behavior of many of the different animals. I had been there with my family twice before but this trip was by far the most educational and the most interesting. I'm convinced that field trips that involve a little bit of expense should not quickly be ruled out and passed by. Most of the time the value exceeds the expense.

Christian education is a God-centered education based upon His revelation as He gave it to us in the inspired Scriptures. Scripture must be the basis for all instruction. It is the light that enables us to see, the key that opens our understanding, the infallible guide that leads us as we consider the creation around about us.

Not only does God reveal Himself in all His perfections in Scripture but He also reveals many of His attributes and virtues to us in creation, in history, in music and even in the works of man. When man builds a magnificent cathedral or composes a beautiful symphony, he unwittingly reveals God's glory in the form and the music.

When Samuel Morse carefully tapped out a message on his new invention, the telegraph, on May 24, 1844, in Washington, D.C., the instant response quickly tapped back by the receiver in Baltimore was "What Hath God Wrought!" That must always be our response when we consider the works of God in creation. Not man, but God must receive the praise and glory.

Our Christian schools have been organized with this important goal in mind: We, the parents, want our children to receive a God-centered education. We hire teachers to help us fulfill this high calling to train up our children in the way they should go. God, as our faithful covenant God, gives us the motivation of love for Him and the means to carry out this responsibility and obligation.

Part of this education should include the use of field trips, because the whole creation is the Lord's and can be a classroom.

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### A Fair and Glorious Gift

I wish to see all arts, principally music, in the service of Him who gave and created them. Music is a fair and glorious gift of God. I would not for the world forego my humble share of music. Singers are never sorrowful, but are merry, and smile through their troubles in song. Music makes people kinder, gentler, more staid and reasonable. I am strongly persuaded that after theology there is no art that can be placed on a level with music; for besides theology, music is the only art capable of affording peace and joy of the heart. . . the devil flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God.

— Martin Luther