

Academic Field Trips: Gettysburg, Mt. Vernon, Washington D.C.

Danny Thornburg

(765) 702-1655

danny_thornburg@yahoo.com

Preparing students

This phase of any field trip is perhaps the most demanding and time consuming, but is crucial to the success of the experience for everyone. Research has shown that students given pre-trip instruction learn and retain more from a field trip than those who receive no preparation. The following suggestions will make a difference in your next field trip:

- **Introduce the trip as a part of a lesson.** For example:
 - *The Diary of Anne Frank* -- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
 - Abraham Lincoln/ The Civil War -- Ford's Theatre/Gettysburg
 - James L. Swanson books
 - *Bloody Times*
 - *Chasing Lincoln's Killer*
- **Stimulate students' interest for the trip.** Use artifacts from previous trips such as photos, brochures, or videos.
- **Discuss your expectations for learning, for behavior, and dress code.**
- **Develop an itinerary.**
- **Develop room assignments.**

Preparing others

- **Obtain prior approval from your school or school system.**
- **Obtain parental permissions.**
- **Complete medical forms.**
 - Student Health History (blue card)
 - Medications Permission
- **Fundraising: just say no!**
- **Prepare chaperones (teachers and parents) for their role.**
- **Hold a meeting with parents.**

Preparing yourself

- **Develop a participant checklist.** Develop a system for accounting for everyone on the trip, including chaperones. This may be a checklist with everyone's name that you can check off as you depart for various stages of the trip. You might also consider assigning a number to each participant and conduct a "count off" before leaving.
- **Check the weather in advance.** Check weather conditions of your destination at least a week in advance and then again one day prior to the trip so that you can prepare yourself and your participants accordingly.
- **Reconfirm travel and accommodations.** If you are planning overnight travel, reconfirm hotel bookings, tickets, and so on just prior to departure.

Making the Community Connection

- **Introduce students to the site.** Give the students the historical significance. Always create a teaching moment.
- **Link the visit to the classroom.** Making references to what the students have learned in the classroom enhances the visit.
- **Give structure to the visit while also allowing time for exploration.**
- **Build in opportunities for students to work together.**
- **Interact with students during the visit.**
- **Make the experience more memorable and personal by building on it when you return to the classroom.**
- **Create a blog or Facebook page.**
 - <http://wilsondctrip2013.wordpress.com>
 - <http://wilsondctrip2014.wordpress.com>

Resources

- JuMa Tours, (765) 774-4755, max@jumatours.biz
- Robbins Apparel, (317) 674-8878, nikki@robbinsapparel.com
- Ford's Theatre, (202) 638-2367, groups@fords.org
- Gettysburg, gettysburgfoundation.org
- George Washington's Mt. Vernon, mtvernon.org
- Arlington National Cemetery, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil>
- Washington National Cathedral, <http://www.nationalcathedral.org>
- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, <http://www.ushmm.org>
- Danny Thornburg, tour guide and lesson plans for sites and classroom materials mentioned.