



## Educators' Guide: Activities Write-Up

### Our Learning in Action –

The goals of the Water/Ways project are:

- **Share** national, state, and local histories and **narratives** about water.
- **Reinforce** Minnesotans' individual **relationships** with water.
- **Reinforce** Minnesotans' individual **responsibilities** to water.
- **Build relationships** between Minnesotans through community engagement events and activities preceding, during, and after the exhibit.

It is the hope that people visiting the exhibit, participating in community activities, and / or learning through the supplemental lessons will help further the project's goals. “**Our Learning in Action**” is an opportunity to further your students' learning and reinforce their relationships and responsibilities towards water through stewardship projects.

These stewardship projects build upon what students' have learned in the lessons and through visiting the Water/Ways exhibit. They are intended to be implemented as service-learning opportunities. Why should teachers add service-learning and stewardship projects to their students' water education? These projects help:

- Strengthen student understanding of Minnesota's water narratives
- Develop critical-thinking, problem-solving, leadership, decision-making, communication, and collaboration skills
- Connect classroom learning on water to real-world applications
- Develop a sense of place and purpose
- Build relationships within the community and among each other

### Host a Student-Led Water Festival or Learning Fair

Students can share their new knowledge and relationship with water by hosting a water festival. This is a learning event with a water theme. While some communities host large events, your students can host an event that is smaller in scale but extremely impactful. Similar to a science fair or school open house, students can showcase their projects from the Water/Ways lessons, share their learning, and engage others in learning and sharing their water stories.

Planning for a water festival can be divided into four parts. It is strongly encouraged to have students drive the planning and implementation.



## Pre-Planning

Pre-planning involves determining the umbrella ideas for the type of event that will be held. It is the *who, what, where, and when* of getting ready for a water festival.

- Determine the audience for the water festival. Will it be the general public, parents, peers, younger students?
- Select a date
  - Are there other community events that will conflict with this date or complement it?
- Will other organizations be invited to exhibit or lead activities (local Water/Ways partners, natural resources professionals, water stakeholders, the individuals that were interviewed by students, etc)? These organizations will be contacted during the planning stage.
- Select a time for the event and establish a schedule for the event.
- Where will the event be held (inside or outside? In the classroom, another school area, or a non-school location)?
  - Who needs to be contacted to approve the location? For example, if the water festival will take place at the school after traditional school hours, who needs to be contacted or give approval? Is there a cost? Is the location available on the selected date?
  - Are there any special requirements?

Make basic budget decisions during this phase. Will additional funds be necessary? If so, is money available for this or will someone need to be responsible for fund development. Make sure the decisions about the audience, the location, and the date are finalized before formally moving on to the planning stage.

## Planning

The first step of the planning stage is to set a timeline. This is a particularly important step if students are leading the development of the water festival. Establish committees and duties; who is responsible for what activities and who ensures these tasks are completed? The following things need to be addressed during this stage of planning:

- What activities will be included at the festival? Will there be an exhibit hall? Will students conduct on-site interviews to collect participant's water stories? What will be the hands-on component for the event?
  - Many of the activities from the lessons could be modified for a hands-on element at the water festival.
  - How can the humanities be incorporated to strengthen the activities and community of this event?
  - If there are other groups exhibiting or participating, what role will they play?
- What is the event schedule? Are there activities that will take place only at a certain time? How will this be communicated?
- Communicate with any outside partners. Make sure they know the role they will play and what is expected of them.
- Invite the desired audience once a date, time, and place have been selected.
  - Promote the event through press releases, posters, and other announcements if the public is invited.

- Logistics – tour the site so there are no surprises. Where will people park? Where are the restrooms? What happens if something spills? What is the room capacity?
- Raise funds, if needed. What methods will be used to raise funds for this event? Local businesses, organizations, and foundations may provide sponsorships or small grants to support your event. Have students develop a letter of request that includes information on the event.
- Create displays and gather materials for programming. These should support the activities that were selected for the event.
- Practice and prepare! If students are presenting or leading activities, it will be critical that they practice, practice, practice.

## **Implementation**

This is the time period when all the planning becomes action! It's the 24-hour time period before the festival until all clean-up is completed.

- Have at least one person as a point of contact for questions and emergencies of individuals providing programming at the water festival and also for participants at the event.
- Review the schedule and the responsibilities of students and committees.
- Do a final gathering of materials.
- Hang signs and posters; set up exhibits, displays, and program areas.
- Make any final confirmations that may be necessary.
- Talk to press for before or after event coverage and update social media (if you are using it as a promotional tool).
- Arrive early to make sure everything is ready for the event.
- Have fun!
- Make sure that everyone who is on the clean-up team knows what they are responsible for and stays to get it done.

## **Wrap-up, Reflection, and Evaluation**

This is a critical step that is often overlooked. After the event is completed, provide students and any other partners the opportunity to discuss the event. What went well? What could be improved? What did they enjoy? How did the event add to their water story and their relationship with water? Is this something that you want to repeat in future years?

Balance reflection and evaluation both quantitatively (how many people came? etc) and qualitatively (how did the event make you feel? etc.). A journal or reflection writing on the event is a good way for students to think about the event. What relationships were built or strengthened through this type of event? How did this event help strengthen community?

Water festivals are a positive way to evaluate learning of students, showcase learning with the community, and educate the public on water issues.

## **Participate in a Waterway Cleanup**

Your students can work to improve the health of local waters by leading or participating in a waterway cleanup. This can be a single event or can be an on-going project. You may also want to partner with another organization that is hosting a waterway cleanup or invite others to participate in a cleanup that your students

host. Some Water/Ways host sites, nature centers, and other organizations hold waterway / river cleanups and frequently look for volunteers to help with planning and implementation.

Encourage students to consider their relationship with water as they commit their time to the cleanup project. Have students reflect on the familial view many Native Americans have towards water. In this way, they are caring for a family member, and the water will also care for them.

Following the cleanup, allow time for a debrief to discuss how they felt. Some students may feel anger or sadness if there is a large amount of trash in their area. Encourage students to discuss this, but work towards a positive resolution. Have students focus on their effort and relationship with water. Discuss ways that students can continue the momentum of their work or ways that they can encourage more stewardship in their community. Waterway cleanups are a positive step for maintaining healthy watersheds.

Participating in a waterway cleanup can be fun and rewarding. It's a way for students to take care of something they care about: water. Here are some reminders for being successful and keeping students safe and happy when working in the field:

- Have a plan – make sure someone at school know where your group is going and when you will be back. Have a plan in place in case you do not return or check in on time.
- Use the buddy system! Have students work in pairs when in the field.
- Stay on the path or within designated areas.
- Bring plenty of water and any other supplies you will need for the length of time you will be in the field.
  - Sunscreen and hats are important when working in the sun.
  - Know which students have allergies and have appropriate allergy medicines.
  - Bring a first aid kit.
- Bring plenty of trash and recycling bags. Have a plan for disposing of the waste. Coordinate with a local trash hauler to handle large items.
- Wear gloves – especially if collecting medical waste.
- Wear appropriate footwear and clothing and leave jewelry at home.
  - Tennis shoes or hiking boots with socks are best. Make sure they can get muddy and wet for waterway cleanups.
  - Light-colored clothing makes it easier to see ticks and keeps cool in the heat.
  - A change of clothes will make the ride home a lot more comfortable.
- Respect fences. Do not enter private property without permission.
- Don't eat berries or other plants if you are unsure of what they are.
- Leaves of three: LET IT BE! Watch out for poison ivy!
- Keep your eyes and ears open. Wild animals should be respected and left alone.
- Use common sense!

Extension:

Create a visual exhibit to showcase the items collected during the waterway cleanup. Have students create signage to share information on their project, what they collected, what they learned, and what they would like others to learn from the experience.

Other Minnesota waterway resources:

Adopt-a-River (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/adoptriver/faq.html>)

Citizen Science (<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/living-green/citizen-science>)

## **Design Your Own Project**

Based on the learning your students have completed and their identification of local water issues, have them design their own stewardship project.

The first step towards student-designed projects is **Observing and Discovery**. It provides students with the opportunity to create context. As they think, observe, research, read, consult, and discover, the information begins to matter.

A majority of this will have been completed as students learned about the water narratives in their community. Based on what they have learned, have students (as a whole class or in small groups for multiple projects) identify specific issues that they would like to address and an associated project that they will implement. Communicating and possibly partnering with the Water/Ways host sites or another community stakeholder can provide additional resources and relationships for the identification and implementation of student stewardship projects.

The second step is **Creating**. Allow students to the choices of developing their project. Students make a plan for the project and document their ideas, discuss these ideas, and make revisions.

Students should answer the following questions as they develop their project:

- How will the project address the community issue and benefit the community?
- What will the project include?
- What is the timeline?
- What resources are needed? Is there a cost (if so, who will cover the cost)?
- What community partners or resource people should be involved? Who will contact them?
- If the event needs to be publicized, who will do that?

Have students **Implement** their project. This can happen when the project questions are answered and prepared for in conjunction with the timeline. After the project has been completed, allow students to **reflect** and **evaluate** their project.

Below is a list projects that may be considered for student projects:

- Water Testing
- Water Audit at the School
- Watershed Restoration Project (including planting native trees and vegetation)
- Spread the Word – developing a watershed newsletter or public education campaign
- Create a “Healthy Watershed” Checklist / Field Guide and share with members of the community
- Develop healthy watershed pledge and share with community