



Tips for Teaching Outdoors in Winter

Bringing your classroom outdoors in winter can be a magical and memorable experience. Here are some tips and tricks to make sure that your outdoor time goes smoothly.

Advance Preparation

- Those kids grow fast! Remind parents several weeks in advance to locate and have their children try on their winter clothing (boots, coats, snow- or rain pants) so that they can acquire any clothing that the kids have outgrown.
- Create a spare clothing supply for your class. Winter clothes that have been outgrown can be donated to the classroom supply for students in need. Kids often lose a mitten or two. Keep extras on hand. Extra clothes are also useful to change into back in the classroom for anyone who got wet outdoors.
- Know your outdoor location. Is there a sheltered area if the weather turns and for a hot chocolate break?

- Have a plan for the outdoor time. This is even more important during the winter than at other times of year so that your time is used efficiently when that cold wind blows!

How to Dress

- Even wildlife dress in layers! From beavers to wolves, mammals stay warm and dry in wet and cold weather thanks to their different types of hair in their fur. Outer guard hairs shed water like a raincoat, protecting their undercoat of down hair, which traps air and keeps them warm and insulated.
- We don't have the benefit of guard and down hair so we need to work a bit harder to stay warm and dry. Layers work best because you can remove a layer when

you are active and warm up and put a layer back on when snow falls.

- One of the most important tips is to avoid cotton. Cotton isn't insulating and it holds moisture, which will give you a chill when you stop moving. Instead choose wool or synthetic fibers such as nylon, rayon, or polyester.

Base layer:

- This layer wicks moisture away from your skin when you sweat. A thin base layer (long sleeve shirt and long underwear) made of merino wool, silk, or synthetic fibers is critical for staying warm and dry.

Mid layer:

- The middle layer is insulating, retaining body heat and protecting you from the cold. Wool or fleece sweaters and fleece pants are good choices for this layer. Avoid jeans.

Overlayer:

- This serves as our "guard hair" shell, shielding us from wind, rain and snow. Ideally this layer is both water resistant and breathable, allowing perspiration to be released when we're active. Water resistant rain jackets and rain pants work well, or ski jackets and snow pants in colder weather. Down is compact and insulating as long as it doesn't get wet.

Don't forget the small stuff!

- Gloves or mittens. Mittens are warmer but gloves allow for more dexterity. Make sure that they have a waterproof layer on the outside especially if using in the snow or rain.
- Socks. Avoid cotton socks. Thermal socks made of wool or synthetic fibers will make all the difference in keeping toes toasty and students happy.
- Boots. Winter boots that are waterproof and insulated are best. Students in running shoes or rubber boots won't last long in cold and wet weather.
- Sunglasses and sunscreen. Sunshine is a welcome sight in the winter, but it can also cause sunburn and damage the eyes when reflected off of snow.
- Hats and scarves.



Extras:

- Small plastic bags. In a pinch they can line a leaky boot.
- Hand and toe warmers. Found at most hardware and outdoor stores, these single use air-activated heat packs can fit in mittens or boots and provide long lasting heat. (They can also lead to inquiry on chemical reactions!)

Timing:

- Make sure everyone goes to the bathroom before going outdoors. Even if they insist they don't need to!
- Tag onto outdoor time such as before or after recess to minimize the amount of time to get suited up.
- On very cold or wet days, keep your outdoor time short. Have a plan so that you use your time efficiently. But remain flexible to change the plan depending on the weather and students' energy and interest.

Make it Fun:

- Bring hot chocolate or hot cider and nutritious treats to help warm up.
- Include some free time where the students do what they would like to do. See the list of winter activities for some ideas.