

Friends of

**Helping young students
take a closer look
at what rivers are,
what lives there and
why they are important**

exploring rivers

**A Curriculum for
Kindergarten through Fourth Grade**



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Friends of the Chicago River

Friends of the Chicago River is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving, protecting and fostering the vitality of the Chicago River for the people, plant and animal communities in its watershed. Friends works in three areas to achieve its mission: education, on-the-ground projects that physically improve the quality of the river and policy and planning efforts.

Friends' education program is dedicated to fostering awareness, involvement and a stewardship ethic. The program offers training and assistance to teachers grades K-12. Friends' helps teachers develop Chicago River units, take their students on fieldtrips to the Chicago River, and engage their students in service projects.

For more information on how Friends can help you meet state standards, engage your students and develop your students' learning skills call or email Friends of the Chicago River at (312)939-0490 or friends@chicagoriver.org.

Curriculum Overview

The Exploring Rivers Curriculum aims to introduce students to what rivers are, what plants and animals depend on rivers and why rivers are important. Students learn how rivers form and change over time, about the interrelationships between the rich variety of life that depends on rivers and build a personal connection to rivers through exploration and direct experience.

The curriculum includes units for each of the grades Kindergarten through Fourth. The entire curriculum is guided by the essential question: How do we come to know and appreciate the river environment and our place in it. Under this overarching essential question, each grade level focuses on several specific questions, called content questions (see the following page for a list of these content questions). These content questions focus the students' exploration at each grade level. Since each grade level unit explores a different aspect of the essential question, the units build on each other. However, each grade level unit stands on its own as well. The lessons are designed to help students meet state learning standards in a hands-on and integrative manner. By connecting classroom studies to a local natural resource – your local river – students make connections between learning and the world around them, and between themselves and the environment.

Journals are used throughout the curriculum as a way for students to track and reflect on their learning. A general rubric, called the 3-Point Journal Rubric is included at the beginning of the curriculum. This rubric is used as a way to assess many of the students' journal entries. The aim of the rubric is to encourage students to use higher level thinking skills in their responses.

Another important element of this curriculum is the field trips to the river. Each grade level unit includes one field trip to the river. Giving students the opportunity to explore and learn from the river can be a very compelling, memorable and meaningful experience for students. It helps solidify learning that has taken place in the classroom because students apply what they have learned in a real world context. The field trip also builds a personal connection between the students, the environment and learning.

Essential and Content Questions:

Essential Question:

How do we come to know and appreciate the river environment and our place in it?

Content Questions by grade level:



Kindergarten: Observation

- What is a river?
- What lives in and around a river?
- How can we classify the living things that depend on a river?



First Grade: Habitats

- What is a river habitat?
- What basic needs does the river provide for plants and animals?



Second Grade: Cycles

- What is a water cycle?
- What is the relationship of the river to the life cycles of plants and animals?
- How do the seasons affect the river?



Third Grade: Survival & Adaptations

- What plant and animal adaptations allow them to survive in a river environment?
- What food chains and food webs can be found in a river ecosystem?



Fourth Grade: Environment

- What is our connection to the river environment?
- What makes a river healthy?
- How can we positively affect the river environment?

Journals

Journals are used throughout the curriculum. When you begin the Exploring Rivers unit with your students have them make their own river journal. Journals can be made from notebooks, folded and stapled paper or they can be a folder in which students keep adding their work.

The following 3-point journal rubric is used throughout the curriculum to assess a variety of student journal entries. The rubric encourages students to be more complete in their answers and to make connections between what they are learning and their daily lives.

Three-Point Journal Rubric

- 1 point: summarize
- 2 points: summarize
 give examples
- 3 points: summarize
 give examples
 make connections