WELCOME TO YOUR CHICAGO RIVER

Dear students, parents and teachers,

In Chicago, when you want to have fun on the water, you probably go to Lake Michigan. But did you know there is just as much to do along the Chicago River?

The Chicago River system is 156 miles long. At many places such as city parks and county forest preserves, it's free and open to the public all year round. There are natural areas with trails where you can hike and watch wildlife. There are paved paths where you can bike or push a stroller. There are shallow areas where you can wade. There are places where you can rent a canoe.

Like Lake Michigan, the Chicago River is much cleaner than it used to be. But unlike the lake, it isn't clean enough to swim in yet. If you want to wade in the water, wear boots or hip-waders. Be sure to wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after touching river water.

If you see any animals, do not touch or feed them. Be careful of poison ivy. (Poison ivy can be difficult to identify. For pictures of poison ivy in different seasons, see www.poison-ivy.org.) Please do not pick anything or take anything from the river home with you. Remember to dispose of litter properly.

You might want to bring a snack, water or other beverages, hand sanitizer, a first aid kit, a bird or other wildlife guide, paper, pencils, crayons or colored pencils, and a camera to capture how much fun you had.

GETTING TO THE CHICAGO RIVER
VISIT THE RIVER BY TRAIN OR BUS
The easiest part of the river to visit by public transportation is downtown. You can visit Wolf Point, rest at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza, walk across the many bridges, stroll along the riverwalk, take a water taxi, or explore the Bridgehouse Museum (see page 22). Other locations accessible by public transportation are listed on these pages with an ∗.

TRAILS TO HIKE, BIKE, AND EXPLORE

**STROLLERS OR YOUNGER SIBLINGS ARE WELCOME too!**

**RAPID WOLF SLough**
Located on the south side of Half Day Rd. between Waukegan Rd. and Ridge Rd. A 2.5-mile unpaved loop circles restored wetlands, prairie and oak woodlands.

**BUNKER HILL**
Located on the west side of Caldwell Ave. between Harris Ave. and Devon Ave., this 2.3-mile paved segment of the North Branch bike trail travels along (and over) the river. The bike trail begins at Caldwell Ave. and Devon Ave., just west of the Edgebrook Metra station, and doesn't cross any roads.

**RONAN, RIVER, AND LEGION PARKS**
Located just east of Jersey Ave. and Kedzie Ave., between Devon Ave. and Lawrence Ave. The south end of the bike path is just ½ blocks north of the Francisco stop on the CTA Brown Line. These three parks encompass a 3.0-mile paved segment of the North Shore Channel Trail.

**PLUM CREEK MEADOW**
Located east of Barnham Ave. just north of 223rd St. in southeastern Cook County, this forest preserve has a 2.0-mile unpaved trail loop.

For more ideas on getting to the Chicago River, visit www.chicagoriver.org/programs.

Finally, you don’t have to go to the river to do most of the activities in this guide. If you can’t get to the river, you could go to a neighborhood park, forest preserve, or other natural area instead.

The Chicago River is a place to preserve and enjoy. There is so much to do and see on the Chicago River. This guide is a way to start. The activities in this guide are organized into sections.

GETTING TO THE CHICAGO RIVER, PP. 3–4

GETTING READY, PP. 5–6
These pages will let you express your creativity and knowledge. They will include activities that can be done at home and will prepare you for your adventures to come.

RIVER ADVENTURES, PP. 7–15
These pages will get you up and out to a neighborhood park, forest preserve, or (hopefully) to the Chicago River. They include outdoor games, scavenger hunts and other challenging activities.

REFLECTION & ACTION, PP. 15–20
These pages will let you reflect upon what you've learned and suggest ways to help improve local habitats in the Chicago River watershed. They will link you with more fun activities and ways of getting involved.

MORE INFORMATION, PP. 21–22
NATURAL AREAS TO EXPLORE

ST. PAUL WOODS* MORTON GROVE
Located near the intersection of Lincoln Ave. and Lehigh Ave. south of Dempster St. and one block west of the Morton Grove Metra station. There are no formal trails, but there are great open woodlands and picnic areas near the river.

GOMPERS, FIELD, AND KIWANIS PARKS* CHICAGO
Located between W. Argyle St. and W. Foster Ave. not far from CTA Brown Line and Foster Ave. buses. These are great little parks for exploring the Chicago River in the urban environment. Gompers Park has a 0.5-mile paved trail around the lagoons, and all three have bridges.

LAKE KATHERINE PALOS HEIGHTS
Located at 7402 W. Lake Katherine Dr., the Nature Center & Botanic Gardens include 125 acres of water, 3.5 miles of paved and wooded trails, gardens and open space for exploring along the Cal-Sag Channel.

THORN CREEK WOODS PARK FOREST
Located at 247 Monee Rd., a 2.5-mile unpaved trail winds through 880 acres of oak hickory forest dominated by 150-year-old oak trees, native shrubs and spring wildflowers. Thorn Creek, a tributary of the Little Calumet River, flows through glacial pothole ponds, marshes, and prairie remnants.

CANOE THE CHICAGO RIVER
From June through October, Friends of the Chicago River offers guided canoe trips. Tours include downtown Chicago, Goose Island, the North Branch, the Baha'i Temple, and Skokie Lagoons. Most trips are six hours long and cost around $40. For more information, visit www.chicagoriver.org. Friends also offers shorter canoe trips through the Chicago Park District. Chicago River Canoe and Kayak (www.chicagoriverpaddle.com) also rents canoes and kayaks by the hour.

GETTING READY

MAKE YOUR OWN BINOCULARS
1. Take two toilet paper tubes and glue or tape them together the long way.
2. When the glue is dry, punch holes on the outside edge near one end.
3. Thread a piece of yarn or string through each hole and tie a knot. Decorate them with paint, glitter, stickers, ribbon, etc.
4. Hang your binoculars around your neck and you’re ready to go!

MATERIALS
• Two toilet paper tubes
• Glue or tape
• Hole punch
• Yarn or string
• Paint, glitter, etc.

Don’t forget to take your binoculars with you as you explore the Chicago River on your river adventures.

GETTING READY

TRACK MATCHING
Can you match the tracks to the animal that makes them? Draw a connecting line between the animal and its track. For answers, visit www.chicagoriver.org/programs.

How do you know which track belongs to which animal?
Do they have big or small feet?
How many toes do you count?

All of these animals live near the Chicago River. Take this guide with you when you visit the river to see if you can locate any of these tracks.

RIVER ADVENTURE

TRACK AN ANIMAL AT THE RIVER
Find some animal tracks in the mud or snow and follow them.

What kind of animal made the tracks? Where was it going? What do you think it was doing?

In the space below, draw a small picture of any tracks you see. Then draw a picture of the animal you think made them. Use the animals on page six as a guide or look them up in a field guide to tracks.
RIVER ADVENTURE
SIT AND LISTEN: SOUND MAP

1. Sit still on the ground or on a log and be very, very quiet. Listen for sounds all around you.
2. Make a map of what you hear in the box below.
3. Draw a picture or write down what you hear in front of you, behind you, and to your left and right. Do you hear the wind blowing or water splashing?

Do you hear any animals? You can close your eyes if it helps. You can use binoculars from page five to locate animals as well.

RIVER ADVENTURE
NATURE SLIDE SHOW

1. Carefully cut out the square along the dotted line. (Please recycle the scrap of paper.)
2. Use the open square as a slide frame to make your own slide show.
3. As you walk along the river, hold the open square over leaves, petals, tree bark, bugs—anything you think is interesting.
4. Share your slide show with the other people on your river adventure.

NATURE CAMERA

As you walk along the river, hold the open square from the slide show activity above up to your eyes like a camera.

Use your memory like film in a camera to capture images of the river, trees, flowers, the sky (but don’t “take a picture” of the sun)—anything you think is interesting.

Challenge yourself to “take a picture” of something representing each color in the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple).

RIVER ADVENTURE
TOUCH, LISTEN, AND SMELL

Have a partner, such as a parent or friend, put on a blindfold. If you don’t have a blindfold, just have your partner close their eyes.

Carefully lead them along a trail. Don’t go too fast! Remember they can’t see.

1. Find interesting objects, like smooth stones or bumpy tree bark, for your partner to TOUCH. (Be careful of poison ivy and other prickly plants.)

2. Ask your partner to LISTEN to different sounds and guess what they are.

3. You could even have your partner SMELL things, like flowers or soil.

4. Now it’s your turn to wear the blindfold.

RIVER ADVENTURE
SCAVENGER HUNTS

BIG AND SMALL

Look around you as you walk along the river. How many of these things can you find?

- A rock smaller than your fingernail
- A rock that fits in the palm of your hand
- A leaf bigger than your hand
- A flower smaller than a pencil eraser
- A flower bigger than this page
- A stick shorter than your finger
- A stick longer than your arm from your fingers to your elbow
- A tree you can put your arms all the way around
- A tree too big to fit your arms all the way around

Can you find a really big example of something and a really small one, such as a monster acorn and a teeny-tiny acorn?
COLORS
Can you find something at the river that’s green? Maybe you can see a green leaf, a grasshopper, or a mallard duck’s head.
How about something that’s...
- red
- yellow
- blue
- orange
- brown
- black
- white
- purple

TEXTURES
Can you find something that’s smooth?
How about something that’s...
- rough
- prickly
- sharp
- soft
- hard
- squishy
- feathery
- fuzzy

Show what you found to a parent or friend. Can they guess what word you were thinking when you chose it?
Can you find two objects that are opposites? (one smooth, one rough, for example)

RIVER ADVENTURE
STICK RACE
For this activity, you will need some sticks and a bridge.

1. Stand on the bridge and throw a stick into the river. Watch the stick float with the current.
2. Does the water flow faster in the middle of the river? Or near the bank?
3. Pick a start and finish line and have a stick race with a parent or friend. Whose stick wins?
4. Find other natural things to race, such as leaves or bark. (Be sure not to pick anything living.) What goes the fastest?

Good parks with bridges for this activity:
- Middlefork Savanna
- North Park
- Glenview Woods
- Linn Woods
- Banker Hill
- Gompers Park
- River Park
- McLaughley Springs Woods
- Sauk Trail Woods
- Thorn Creek Woods

For directions, visit www.chicagoriver.org/programs.

RIVER ADVENTURE
LAND ART
Land art, or earthworks, is a kind of art that is made in nature out of natural objects.

One famous example is Spinal Jetty. This sculpture, along the shore of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, is a spiral shape made of mud and rock.

Make your own land art by the Chicago River. You could sculpt something out of mud and rock, too.

You could make a tower of rocks or sticks. You could collect different things, like leaves, flowers, or acorns, and arrange them in a pretty design. (Be sure not to pick anything living.) Leave your art installation behind for someone else to find.

RIVER ADVENTURE
GET TO KNOW A TREE

1. Find a tree that you like. Look at its leaves. What shape are they? Are they big or small? Does the tree have any flowers or seeds?
2. Touch the tree’s bark. What does it feel like? What does it smell like? Are there any birds or other animals in your tree? How about insects?
3. Can you find another tree nearby that looks similar? Do a leaf or bark rubbing on another sheet of paper to take home.
4. To learn more about the tree, find a leaf on the ground to take home. Have an adult help you use the tree identification guide at www.arborday.org/trees/treeguide.

REFLECTION & ACTION
STAINED GLASS WINDOW
Collect colorful objects to make a “stained glass window.” The objects must be flat like flower petals, grass and leaves. (Be sure not to pick anything living.) Place the objects between two pieces of wax paper. Make sure not to put too many objects on the wax paper.

Cover the whole thing with a cloth or a napkin and have an adult help you iron it with a hot iron to stick everything together. If you wish, make a decorative frame and hang your artwork in a window to catch the sunlight.
REFLECTION & ACTION
MAKE AN ANIMAL MASK

1. Find different animal masks at www.chicagoriver.org/programs. All of these animals live near the Chicago River.

2. Have an adult help you print your favorite mask or make one of your own. Decorate it however you like. Do you want to choose the colors the animal really is? Or do you want to make a pink raccoon or a green deer?

3. Cut carefully around the edge of the mask. Then poke a small hole on each side. Thread some yarn or elastic through the holes and tie the ends in a knot behind your head.

4. Put the mask on and have fun!

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REFLECTION & ACTION
WRITE YOUR OWN RIVER POEM

Write your own poem about the river. Insert a word or phrase that starts with each of the letters below. Use words that describe the river.

For example: “C” could be “cold,” “R” could be “running” or “rough.” Once you finish your poem, visit the Bridgehouse Museum. See page 22 for directions and free admission. Go to the front desk and claim your prize!

The Chicago River is...

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REFLECTION & ACTION
SAVING WATER

There are many simple ways that you and your family can save water. Here are just a few ideas:

1. Turn off the faucet while you brush your teeth.
2. If you want a drink of cold water, don’t run the water until it gets cool. Instead, keep a pitcher of cold water in the refrigerator.
3. Plug the bathtub before turning on the water.
4. Fix dripping faucets and running toilets.
5. Don’t water the lawn. Let it go dormant during the heat of the summer.
6. Disconnect your downspouts, or install a rainbarrel. Use the collected water to water your lawn or garden.
7. Adopt a stream or river. For more information on what you can do to help, visit www.chicagoriver.org/get-involved.

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REFLECTION & ACTION
VOTE FOR YOUR FAVORITE ANIMAL

All of these animals live near the Chicago River. The animals with a star are the ones you are most likely to see.

Did you come across any of these animals on your visit?

- Red-tailed hawk
- Muskrat
- White-tailed deer*
- Red fox
- Blanding’s turtle
- Dragonfly*
- Fox snake
- Bullfrog*
- River otter
- Bluegill sunfish*
- Mallard duck*
- Monarch butterfly*
- Red-bellied flicker
- Painted turtle*
- Grasshopper
- Kingfisher
- Cardinal
- Cicada
MORE INFORMATION

PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT RIVERS
Dorrans, Arthur. *Fish in the Water From Brook to Ocean*. 1991. Illustrates the path of water from mountain snow melt to brook to river and out to the ocean.


Robertson, Kayo. *Sigs Along the River—Learning to Read the Natural Landscape*. 1986. Pictures and phrases prompt the reader to practice observation skills to understanding natural processes.

WEBSITES ON THE CHICAGO RIVER
www.chicagoriver.org and chicagoriver.org/think
bridgehousemuseum.org
chicagoriver.net
cityofchicago.org (bridge lift calendar)
historichbridges.org (bridges)
chicagorowing.org
chicagoriverpaddle.com
chicagopaddling.org
encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/chicago_river

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CHICAGO RIVER?

Come to Chicago’s most unusual museum—the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum. The museum, operated by Friends of the Chicago River, celebrates Chicago’s river and world-famous movable bridges. The bridgehouse is built like a tower and has five small floors. On each floor, you will discover stories that unlock the secrets of the Chicago River.

For example, did you know that as late as the 1820s you had to walk over a floating log bridge or take a ferry to cross the river? Today, Chicago has 37 moveable bridges—more than any other city in the world. At the museum, you can actually see the massive bridge gears that still open and close the Michigan Avenue Bridge.

The Bridgehouse Museum is located in the southwest tower of the Michigan Avenue Bridge at river level and is open spring through fall. Visit www.bridgehousemuseum.org for museum hours, directions and other information.

Show this booklet at the front desk of the Bridgehouse Museum and receive two free admissions, compliments of:

Friends of the Chicago River

Complete the activity on page 17 before your visit for a prize.

THIS ACTION—ADVENTURE POCKET GUIDE WAS PRODUCED THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE WRIGLEY COMPANY FOUNDATION

The Wrigley Company Foundation is proud to support the education of today’s youth and the protection of our irreplaceable natural resources, including the Chicago River.

The mission of Friends of the Chicago River is to improve and protect the Chicago River system for people, plants, and animals.

Friends of the Chicago River
411 South Wells Street, Suite 810 • Chicago, Illinois 60607
tel 312.939.0490 • fax 312.939.0931 • www.chicagoriver.org