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.

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. 5-8

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.

RECOLLECTION & ACTION, PP. 16-20

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

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 asterisk.

TRAILS TO HIKE, BIKE, AND EXPLORE

NORTH BRANCH BIKE TRAIL* WILMETTE TO CHICAGO

A 4.4-mile paved black trail loop between Dundee Rd. and Tower Rd. circles the Skokie Lagoons. The red trail continues 13.0 miles south to Devon Ave. and the Edgewater Metra station, if you’re looking for a longer trip.

NORTH SHORE CHANNEL TRAIL* EVANSTON TO CHICAGO

An 7.0-mile paved trail from Green Bay Rd. south to Lawrence Ave. The south end is just 2½ miles north of the Francisco stop on the CTA Brown Line.

JOHN HUSAR & M CANAL TRAIL* WILLOW SPRINGS

The parking lot for this looped trail is next to the Willow Springs Metra station near the intersection of Willow Springs Rd. and Archer Ave. (117). The 8.9-mile paved bicycle trail consists of two 3.3-mile loops and a 2.3-mile connection.

RUBIO AND CARLSON SPRINGS WOODS AIDLOTHIAN

The parking lot is located north of the Midlothian Tappan between Ridgeland Ave. and Central Ave. The 9.4-mile paved loop of the Tinley Creek red trail takes you through woodland and open grassy meadows.

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

**NORTH PARK/FLORENCE N.P. LINCOLNSHIRE**
This park and nature preserve is located near the intersection of W. Everett Rd. and Riverwoods Rd. The entrance to the park is on the east side of Riverwoods Rd. This park is wooded and has many bridges over the West Fork of the North Branch.

**LINNE WOODS** MORTON GROVE
This forest preserve is just north of Dempster St. at Lehigh Ave. not far from the Morton Grove Metra station. It has a bridge and connects to the 8.5 miles of unpaved trails along the North Branch, tan, yellow, and orange trails.

**MACLAUGHEY SPRINGS WOODS** PALOS PARK
Located on the west side of S. Kean Rd. between Cal-Sag Rd. (83) and 119th St., this site has an open grassy area surrounded on three sides by a shallow and washable Mill Creek. It connects to a 8.1-mile unpaved loop on the Sag Valley yellow trail. You can hike shorter loops as well.

**GOODENOW GROVE** BEECHER
Located at 27064 S. Dutton Rd., 1.25 miles east of the intersection of Route 1 and I-394, this preserve has a 2.0-mile looped unpaved trail which includes two 0.5-mile side trails to Plum Creek.

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 Bahat' 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 RAIN GAUGE**
A rain gauge is a tool that measures rainfall. It’s easy to make your own.

1. Cut off the top part of the bottle to make a cylinder. Fill the bottom of the bottle with the stones or gravel. The weight will keep your gauge from falling over.

2. Pour enough water into the bottle to cover the stones. Draw a line along the surface and mark it 0". This is your baseline. Use the ruler and marker to measure 1", 2", and 3" increments from the baseline. If you want to make the gauge more accurate, you could mark off half-inch or quarter-inch increments too. Or you could use centimeters.

3. When rain is predicted, add water up to the baseline. Put the gauge in an open area to collect rain. Don’t put it under trees or near buildings where there is a lot of runoff, or your data won’t be accurate.

4. When the rain stops, check how much fell. Compare your result to the data found at www.wgn.com/weather/almanac. Click on the “historic data” found under the Almanac.

GETTING READY

**CHICAGO RIVER MAP/PUZZLE**

There are many types of maps. A political map shows features like national borders and cities. A physical map shows geographical features like mountains or rivers. Some maps include both political and physical information.

This map is a physical map of the Chicago River and its tributaries (a tributary is a smaller stream that flows into a bigger one). The city of Chicago is shown in dark gray. Compare this map with a road map.

Draw a star on the map to mark where you live. Can you figure out which part of the river is which?

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

GETTING READY

**TRACK MATCHING**
Can you match the tracks to the animal that makes them? How can you tell? For answers, visit www.chicagoriver.org/programs.

RIVER ADVENTURE

**TRACKING AT THE RIVER**
All of the animals above live near the Chicago River. Take this or another guide to tracks with you when you visit the river. Look for tracks and try to identify them.

Was the animal walking or running?
**GETTING READY**

**SCAT MATCHING**

What an animal’s scat looks like usually depends on what it eats.

Can you match the animal with its scat?

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

![Animals and Scats](image)

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**RIVER ADVENTURE**

**SCAT SEARCH AT THE RIVER**

When you go to the river, do you see any scat? If so, can you identify and draw the animal it came from?

**THE SCAT RAP**

*It starts with an “S” and ends with a “T”.
It comes out of you and it comes out of me.
I know what you’re thinking, but don’t call it that.
Be scientific and call it scat.*

Draw the animal

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**RIVER ADVENTURE**

**HOW FAST DOES THE RIVER FLOW?**

To find out, you will need a measuring tape, a stopwatch (or watch with a second hand), two flags or other markers, and some sticks.

1. Measure 100 feet along the riverbank. (Measuring tapes are usually shorter than 100 feet, so measure the distance 20 or 25 feet at a time.) Push a flag into the ground at each end.

2. Toss a stick in the river at the upstream end and time it to the downstream end. How many seconds did it take to flow 100 feet? Try it again. If you run along the river bank, can you keep up?

3. To get the river flow rate in miles per hour (mph), plug your result into the formula below. How does it compare with traffic speeds on nearby roads? Remember, flow rates can change from day to day.

   \[
   \text{River flow rate (mph)} = \frac{100 \text{ feet}}{\text{Your result in seconds}} \times \frac{1 \text{ mile}}{5280 \text{ feet}} \times \frac{3600 \text{ seconds}}{1 \text{ hour}}
   \]

   \[
   = \frac{68.2}{\text{Your result in seconds}}
   \]

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**RIVER ADVENTURE**

**HOW TALL IS THAT TREE?**

You could climb all the way to the top of the tree holding a measuring tape. But why?

1. Stand about a hundred feet away from a tall tree. Have a friend stand as close to the tree as they can. Find a straight stick and hold it vertically at arm’s length. Place (aim) the top of the stick at the top of your friend’s head, and place your thumb at their feet.

2. Move your hand and the stick up the tree (counting how many of your friends it would take to equal the tree’s height). When you get to the top of the tree, multiply your friend’s height by the number of times it took to get to the top of the tree.

**HOW WIDE IS THE RIVER?**

You could swim across the river holding a measuring tape. But why?

1. Stand close to the edge of the river (but not too close), facing across the river. Hold out your arm with your thumb sticking up. Sight the edge of the opposite bank at the tip of your thumb.

2. Now rotate your arm 90 degrees either left or right without moving it up or down. Sight along your side of the bank to a plant or rock. The distance from this object to where you’re standing is equivalent to the river’s width.

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**RIVER ADVENTURE**

**TREE IDENTIFICATION**


Can you identify these six tree leaves?

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

1. [Leaf Image]

2. [Leaf Image]

3. [Leaf Image]

4. [Leaf Image]

5. [Leaf Image]

6. [Leaf Image]

All of these trees are native to the Chicago River watershed. Can you find and identify any growing along the river? How about at your local park or forest preserve?
RIVER ADVENTURE
FAUNA SEARCH

Find a quiet place to sit along the Chicago River. Stay as still as you can. How many animals can you see or hear? The scientific term for animals that live in a particular region is fauna.

Birds may be the easiest to find, especially ducks and geese. If you’re lucky, you might see a frog, a turtle or a white-tailed deer. You might even see a raccoon, river otter, muskrat, coyote or red fox.

To find more creatures, lift up a rock or two. Do you see any insects? How about snakes? Remember not to touch any animals.

RIVER ADVENTURE
ROCK SKIPPING

To skip rocks, you need a lagoon or other still or slow-moving body of water. Fast-running water won’t work as well.

1. Find a small rock that’s flat and smooth. Hold the rock horizontally, flat side down, with your index finger curled around it.

2. Aim the rock at the water’s surface. Throw it sidearm so that your palm travels past your waist. Your elbow should be next to your hip when the rock leaves your hand. As you release it, spin it with your index finger.

3. Don’t give up if the rock splashes into the water without skipping. It takes practice! Just try another.

SKIPPING CHALLENGES

How many times can you skip your rock?
Can you skip it more times than someone else (a friend or family member)?
Can you skip it all the way across the river?
Can you guess (before you throw) how many times your rock will skip?
What makes the best skipping rock—rounded, sharp-edged, heavy or light?

RIVER ADVENTURE
MAKE A TREASURE MAP

You’ll need a partner for this activity. Find a natural object you think is special—perhaps a stone or seashell. Be sure not to pick anything living.

Hide your object, then make a map of the area showing where it is—X marks the spot. Have your partner try to find the “hidden treasure.” Take turns and be creative, choosing different objects to hide. (Be careful of poison ivy and other prickly plants.)

RIVER ADVENTURE
DOWNTOWN LANDMARK HUNT

Find these five downtown landmarks on or around the Michigan Ave. Bridge. Write down a specific letter from each inscription. Titles are included as part of the letter count. Unscramble them to spell a secret word and *win a prize.

1. Begin at the northeast bridgehouse of the Michigan Ave. Bridge. Find a small black plaque commemorating the reversal of the Chicago River. (9th letter)

2. Walk north and turn right to 401 N. Michigan Ave. and find the plaque designating Jean Baptiste Pont du Sable’s home site a National Historic Landmark. (9th letter)

3. Cross to the west side of Michigan Ave., then walk back across towards the south side of the river. Find a bronze bas-relief sculpture of LaSalle and Tonti on the western railing of the Michigan Ave. Bridge. (7th letter)

4. Go to the corner of Michigan Ave. and Wacker Dr. Look down within the concrete to see the bronze markers for Fort Dearborn embedded in the sidewalk. (9th letter)

5. Turn back to the southwest bridgehouse of the Michigan Ave. Bridge. Find the concrete sculpture on the southwest pylon entitled DEFENSE. (13th letter)

Now unscramble the letters to spell the secret word. For the answer, visit www.chicagoriver.org/programs.

When you have it, walk down the stairs to the Bridgehouse Museum (see page 22 for free admission). *Go to the front desk and claim your prize!
**REFLECTION & ACTION**

**WRITE A RIVER HAiku**

Haiku is a form of Japanese poetry. In English, a haiku is usually written on three lines. The first line has five syllables, the second line has seven, and the third line has five. Haiku does not rhyme.

In one traditional form, the first line is about the natural world, the second line is about the human world, and the third line brings them together. Traditional haiku is set in a particular season.

Here’s an example:

**MURKY GREEN RIVER**
**ST. PATRICK’S DAY, GREENER STILL**
**FISH SWIMMING IN DYE**

Write your own haiku about the river.
Try to write about both its natural and artificial characteristics.
Can you fit them both into the last line?

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**REFLECTION & ACTION**

**DEMAND CLEAN WATER**

Right now, you have a historic opportunity to help clean up the Chicago River.

For more than 100 years, the Chicago River was treated like a sewer. So when the Clean Water Act was passed in 1972, officials set incredibly low pollution standards for the river. They were convinced no one would ever want to fish or swim there.

Now these standards are under review. The new standards—if they are approved—would transform the river. For example, treated sewer water would have to be disinfected before it’s dumped into the river. Today it isn’t, so the bacteria in the river can make people sick.

You can help by writing a letter to the Illinois Pollution Control Board. For more information and a sample letter, visit www.chicagoriver.org.

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**REFLECTION & ACTION**

**CHICAGO RIVER DAY**

Each May, Friends of the Chicago River holds its annual cleanup and celebration of the Chicago River. Every year, nearly 4000 volunteers—from toddlers to senior citizens—help clean up over 100 miles along the Chicago River.

In the morning, workers help pick up garbage, sort out recyclables, remove invasive plants, plant native seedlings, and spruce up river trails. In the afternoon, volunteers are invited to enjoy the Chicago River Festival. There’s a free barbeque, live music, an environmental fair, and much more.

For more information on Chicago River Day and other cleanup days, visit www.chicagoriver.org/get-involved.

**MORE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**
- Forest Preserve District of Cook County
  www.fpdccvolunteers.org or call (773) 631-1790 ext. 10
- North Branch Restoration Project
  www.northbranchrestoration.org/calendar
- Palos Restoration Project
  www.home.comcast.net/~palosrestor
- Lake County Forest Preserve District
  www.lcfpd.org/involved/index.cfm?fuseaction=volunteer.view
- Calumet Stewardship Initiative
  www.calumetstewardshipinitiative.org

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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
• Snapping turtle*
• Great blue heron
• Beaver
• Crayfish*
• Screech owl
• Raccoon
• Coyote
• American crow*
• Canada goose*
• Squirrel*
• Blue jay
• Damselfly*
• Skunk
• Catfish
• Tiger salamander
• Tiger swallowtail butterfly
• Great horned owl

Common species*

Visit www.chicagoriver.org/programs to vote for your favorite.

MORE INFORMATION

BOOKS ABOUT RIVERS


LaMarche, Jim. *The Right*. 2000. The story of a boy who doesn't want to spend the summer in the country but ends up loving river rafting and experiencing nature.


WEBSITES ON THE CHICAGO RIVER

www.chicagoriver.org and chicagoriver.org/think

bridgehousemuseum.org

chicagoriver.net

cityofchicago.org (bridge lift calendar)
historicbridges.org (bridges)
chicagorowering.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 movable 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:

Complete the activity on page 15 before your visit for a prize.

Friends of the Chicago River

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

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