

# LOMC Outdoor Education/Team Building

## CURRICULUM

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**\*Illinois Learning Standards are indicated with an asterisk**

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**Prairie Hike:** LOMC's property includes 650 acres of native prairie, woodlands, waterways, and outcroppings of dolomite and St. Peter sandstone. The prairie hike takes students on a hike through these varied environments, studying the characteristics of savannah, wetlands, meadows, hill-top prairies and connecting woodlands. Lessons include plant identification (i.e. sedges, grasses, flowers, medicinal plants and invasive species), animal habitat and behavior studies, and an explanation of restoration work such as prescribed burnings. Through hands-on analysis, students learn about the ecological importance of native prairies and why they make our region so unique. \*12.A.2a; 12.A.2b

**Ravine Hike:** This mile-long hike winds its way up a densely forested ravine to our upper prairie and ends up at a sandstone outcropping (Barber's Cliff) that overlooks the Rock River Valley. Along this trek students learn about riparian zones, waterways, erosion, tree species, seed dispersal, animal habitats and transition zones between forest and prairie. We pass by an old stone milkhouse and discuss the human history of the site. Before making our way back down, we play "Thicket," a learning activity from Project Wild which teaches about camouflage as an animal defense mechanism. \*12.B.2a; 12.E.2a-b

**Pond Study:** This field study deals with our 7-acre pond. Students study the pond first-hand by gathering specimens and observing their collections under microscopes and hand lenses. In working with the Obis identification guide, students identify aquatic animal life and classify plants into shore, emergent, floating and submerged categories. Students can create a simulated oil spill with popcorn and estimate the environmental impact of the artificial disaster. Often, we have the opportunity to observe turtles, beavers, night hawks, geese, ducks, fish and herons. \*5.A.2b; 11.A.2a-b; 12.B.2a-b

**Fishing/Canoeing:** As you might imagine, fishing and canoeing are very popular activities amongst students at LOMC. Both are done at our 7-acre pond which is stream-fed and surrounded by a rich riparian zone. Blue-gill, bass, turtles, beavers and countless birds inhabit "Paul's Pond." The two activities can be done separately or combined to share a 90 minute class. In both cases, LOMC staff provide comprehensive instruction and supervision.

**Ethi-Reasoning:** Environmental ethics and decision making are the focus of this class, in which students must consider how their actions affect the planet as a whole. Depending on the student's age and input from their teacher, this class can attain various goals of environmental education through fun activities and serious discussions. This is one course which requires prior planning with the school's teacher(s), so as to build upon points that have already been introduced in the classroom. \*11.A.2a; 12.E.2c; 13.B.2f

**Orienteering:** This course integrates wildlife studies with a fun scavenger hunt that is conducted with compasses. After learning how to navigate with a compass bearing and a given number of paces, students find hidden clues throughout the woods that lead to various elements of the ecosystem. There are seven stations in total that the students can find, each with a physical clue such as a feather, leaf, beaver-chewed log or a plaster cast of an animal track. Once they have figured out what each clue represents, they hear a story or learn interesting facts concerning that element of the ecosystem.

\*11.A.2a; 12.A.2a-b; 12.B.2a-b

**Wilderness Survival Skills:** Through hands-on exercises, the students learn basic wilderness survival skills and how to safely enjoy the great outdoors. We first discuss the importance of planning a trip and are shown the proper attire and equipment to bring on a trip. The "rule of threes" is explained as one cannot survive in severe conditions without: air for 3 minutes, shelter/warmth for 3 hours, water for 3 days and food for 3 weeks. Students learn how to collect clean water by building a solar still. The next activity is in constructing a debris shelter using a lean-to log with walls of sticks insulated with leaf litter. After each student has taken their turn crawling inside, we gather up in groups of three to learn about survival fires. Of primary importance is to teach about the properties and force of fire, and the respect one must attribute to it. If and when this is understood, each group learns how to build small, safe fires that would be adequate to warm one self if wet and cold. (Your school may choose not to include this last element.) From this course, students learn to recognize the basic requirements for human survival and develop a respect for the forces of nature.

\*4.A.2c; 11.A.2a; 12.B.2b

**Animal Tracks:** This activity is extremely popular among students, yet is limited to the proper weather conditions. If it has been dry for more than a few days, tracks will not register distinctly. With the proper conditions we are likely to find tracks of deer, coyote, wild turkey, beaver, raccoon and groundhog. Students learn about how animals move (their physiology), their habitats and behaviors, and track identification. The students first study the tracks and make up a story about the animal based on what the tracks tell them. Then we pour casts of the individual prints with molding plaster, which the students can take back to school with them. \*5.A.2b; 11.A.2b

**Project Learning-Tree:** A variety of activities are used to investigate the characteristics of forests and to realize their importance in the natural environment and to society. One such activity is where students are partnered up and one of them leads their blind-folded partner to a certain tree which they have to identify with their remaining senses. Once they are returned to their starting point and spun around, the blindfold is removed and the individual must find the same tree they had become familiar with. This is a good exercise in heightening one's senses and in becoming more intimate with nature.

\*4.A.2c; 4.B.2b; 11.A.2a; 12.B.2a

**Owl Pellets:** An owl periodically regurgitates pellets, which contain the undigested parts of its prey. This is an investigative activity in which the students dissect owl pellets, identify the (sterilized!) contents and learn about the predator/prey relationships illustrated by owls. Discussions also lead to wildlife protection and rehabilitation. A field game is played at the end, called "Quick Frozen Critters," which illustrates the competition for food and shelter in the wild. \*5.2.2b; 11.A.2a-b; 12.B.2a-b

**Hashing:** This activity has students trail blazing through the woods of LOMC in search of markers which lend them clues as to the ecosystem they are studying. "Learning Cards" are hidden within ten feet of every third marker. If requested, these cards can be switched out with ones provided by the visiting school as a way of quizzing the students on current course materials. This is one of the ways in which our program can be coordinated with the participating school's curriculum. \*12.A.2b; 12.B.2a

**River Canoe:** Our river trips are along the scenic Rock River, which flows just east of LOMC, and they have provided campers with many great memories since the camp opened in 1974. Trips can be of various lengths, from 2 hours to 2 days. In advance of the excursion, all students are instructed how to paddle and on safety precautions. Once they have demonstrated their comprehension by paddling around Paul's Pond, we set out on the river. A certified lifeguard is along on each trip and each participant is required to wear a lifejacket. These activities are available as long as the weather permits and river conditions are favorable. River canoe trips are only available May through October and must be approved by LOMC's Executive Director.

**Evening Activities:** A variety of activities are available: campfires, sunset hikes, journaling at Barber's Cliff, a visit to the Byron observatory (\*12.F.2a-c), silly Olympics, group games, fishing, arts and crafts such as making a "garbage pizza" (\*12.E.2c; 13.B.2d-f) and tie-dyeing t-shirts. Evening snacks are served every night regardless of the activity.

Day Trips: Local Sites of Interest: Discovery Center (Rockford), Byron Observatory and Nature Center, John Deere Historical Site (Grand Detour), Nachusa Grasslands Prairie Preserve, Castle Rock State Park.

## Team Building Courses

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Team Building activities help meet the following Illinois Learning Standards:

**4.A.2c-d; 21.A.2a-c; 21.B.2; 24.A.2a-b; 24.B.2**

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**Team Building 1:** Group problem-solving activities emphasize trust, cooperation, communication and patience. Small groups work at specific activities such as the *A-Frame*, *Land-Skis*, *Lean-Two*, *Labyrinth*, *Hula-Pass* and *Wind-in-the-Willows*. These structured activities are a fun way to learn the key elements of teamwork. Throughout the activities we discuss the process of 1/clarifying the challenge, 2/gathering input, 3/discussing approaches, 4/concensus building, 5/attempting a solution and 6/evaluating our efforts. Once a team has accomplished this session they can move on to Team Building 2 or the Challenge Course.

**Team Building 2:** This course further develops a group's communication and problem-solving skills with more challenging team initiatives. One of many activities is called *The Magic Ring*, which is a metal ring with 4' strings tied to it, with which everyone takes hold of. The group must suspend the ring with a golf ball on top and maneuver it through a 'golf course' of trees in which they must deposit the ball on top of vertical PVC tubes and move around additional objects. *Stretch-It* is a variation of this, in which the center ring is an elastic band, and with coordinated movement (and *plenty* of communication!) they stack up as many cans as possible. Other activities are *The Spider Web*, *Lap Sit* and *Human Knot*.

**Challenge Course:** The Challenge Course is a series of eight obstacles along a trail through our upper woods. The elements range from an eight-foot wall, which everyone is helped over, to a series of swinging tires that teach the importance of considering those following you as you proceed ahead in a team initiative. Safety is paramount and enforced, although the risk factor is actually minimal while on the course. As in the Team Building sessions, we process each attempt before, during and after the activity. This is a very popular activity among students, as bonding between students happens in a remarkable way.