

**“My Day on the AT”**  
**A Student's Perspective from Their Day on the AT**  
**Sky Meadows Park**  
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**(Blue Ridge Middle School)**

**Big Idea**

**What is the main idea you want your students to come away from the unit knowing?**

- Student familiarity with the section of the AT in their local community
- General knowledge of AT
- Understanding of the importance of how being connected to nature affects their entire well being
- Sense of ownership, stewardship and responsibility to preserve the AT and our national parks
- Sense of accomplishment at finishing a 4.5 mile challenging hike
- Instilling an appreciation of how physical activity in a natural setting can positively affect their health and sense of well being.

**State Standards/Outcomes**

**Which elements of the state framework of standards does this unit address? What are the skills and outcomes you are working towards?**

- Reading 6.4 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of fiction, narrative fiction, nonfiction, poetry.
- Reading 6.5 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of informational selections
- Writing 6.6 The student will write narratives, descriptions, and explanations
- Writing 6.7 The student will edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure.
- Science 6.1 The student will plan and conduct investigations.
- Science 6.5 The student will investigate and understand the unique properties and characteristics of water and its roles in the natural and human-made environment.
- Science 6.6 The student will investigate and understand the properties of air and the structure and dynamics of the Earth's atmosphere.
- Science 6.7 The student will investigate and understand the natural processes and human interactions that affect watershed systems.
- Science 6.9 The student will investigate and understand public policy decisions relating to the environment.

## **Essential Questions (Content)**

**What are the essential questions that will help guide students toward understanding the Big Idea?**

- What and where is the AT?
- Where is Sky Meadows Park? Where is the AT in relation to Sky Meadows?
- What flora and fauna trees are common to our section of the AT?
- What are invasive species? What invasive species are found along the AT at Sky Meadows?
- What is the history of Sky Meadows?
- What is the quality of water and air along the streams at Sky Meadows?
- How do the presence of cows affect the quality of water at Sky Meadows and AT?
- How can the community be informed of the local presence of the AT and provide information on how to use it?

## **Skills and Habits of Mind**

**What are the academic or life skills students will gain from this unit? What habits of mind do you expect them to demonstrate? Think all disciplines.**

- Art/Photography: to identify specific local flora, fauna and invasive species
- Writing: nature journals to document and identify observations; reflective writing, “scrapbook” to document their day on the trail
- Science: Observation and analytical thinking
- History: Mapping skills and history of Sky Meadows and AT
- Keyboarding: Creating pocket-size, laminated id guides of birds and wildflowers
- PE: How to prepare for a hike
- Appreciation of nature
- Sensitivity to human’s impact on ecosystems

## **Community Opportunities**

**What opportunities or needs exist in your school or community that could be addressed by a student project related to your big idea for learning?**

- Purcellville is one of the fastest growing towns in the fastest growing counties. Being a commuter and transient community, its population consists of many newcomers who are unaware of their closest state park, Sky Meadow which contains a section of the AT.
- Increase awareness of general public to the AT
- Increase AT use

## Project

**What project(s) could your class undertake that would actively engage your students in learning about this theme? What could the final product be?**

- Gather information on local flora and fauna
- Identify local flora and fauna using digital cameras
- Identify invasive species using digital cameras
- Conduct water sampling
- Measure tree circumference
- Gather appropriate information that would help the community properly use and enjoy the AT
- Identify selected features on the local section of the AT
- Final Copy: Design scrapbook to entice newcomers to the AT (one copy will be left at Sky Meadows and another will be available on our web site)
- Design survey for AT participants (student created)

## Youth Voice

**How will you guide your students to express ideas, be involved in project decisions, and evaluate outcomes?**

- Brainstorm topics
- Poll students to see how many have been to Sky Meadow Park and the AT
- Section hiker to introduce topics and spark interest and ideas and answer questions
- Practice use and photographic techniques with digital cameras
- Research the birds and wildflowers they may expect to see at Sky Meadows in the spring
- Use of reflection strategies through nature journals
- Use Nature Journals in our outdoor classroom to teach students how to identify flora and fauna and sharpen observation skills and generate questions
- Use digital cameras in our outdoor classroom through art classes to help familiarize students with how to take pictures to document nature
- Use laptops to conduct research on local fauna and flora from our outdoor classroom and then compare and contrast (Venn Diagram) data collected at Sky Meadows field trip

## **Partnerships & Benefit(s)**

**Who are potential community partners that could assist you in this project? What are the potential benefits for your class and your partners of working together?**

- Jack Noll (ATC Education and Outreach Specialist- Southwest and Central Virginia)
- Forest Service
- Local AT Club (Potomac AT Club Lee Sheaffer) Members will help teachers and adults provide supervision, as well as share knowledge during the hike)
- Sky Meadows (Jean Johnston, Chief Ranger)
- Virginia State Arboretum Candace Lutzow-Felling Director of Education: School Programs The State Arboretum of Virginia; volunteers will help teachers and adults provide supervision as well as share knowledge during the hike
- Increased info and use of AT; student engagement & pride in community involvement; student sense of place & ownership in community; student knowledge and appreciation of the natural world around them

## **Resources**

**Describe resources (books, articles, materials, supplies) you will use to support this unit?**

- AT published information
- Selected wildlife identification books (In Keyboarding class, students are currently creating pocket-size, laminated id guides of the birds and wildflowers they may expect to see at Sky Meadows in the spring).
- Leave No Trace literature
- Virginia field guides for flora and fauna
- Rita Hennessy (Guest Speaker in March)
- Section Hiker, John Moone\_(the guest speaker at our TTEC kickoff assembly during American Education Week, November 20),
- Guest Speaker in March: John Jones of the USGS who studies air quality and pollution along the MEGA-transect . Another contact made at Back to School Night from AT powerpoint presentations.
- Parent and guest presenter Mrs. Pasqueline, to demonstrate scrapbooking; will teach students how to make a scrapbook page for this project.
- Large AT map “unveiled” and on display American Education Week to compliment kick off assembly
- Digital cameras purchased through AT grant
- Digital cameras purchased through LEF grant (pending)
- Novel Halfway to the Sky purchased through LEFT grant (pending)
- REI demonstrate No Trace Left Behind and packing a backpack (pending)
- Parents and Trailblazer teachers will meet one Saturday (prior to field trip) with a Sky Meadows Park Ranger to preview the trails and areas
- Powerpoint on this project was shared at Back to School Night (September)

## **Models**

**How will students understand where they're supposed to get? What exemplars of student work will they see? What opportunities will there be for them to critique each other's work?**

- Art teacher will work with students on how to photograph nature as a source of documentation
- Parent is coming to demonstrate scrapbooking to students in November
- PE teachers will work with students on physically preparing them for a hike
- Language arts teachers will model and practice nature journals using our outdoor classroom
- Science and language arts teachers will work with students on how to identify local flora and fauna; conduct water testing using outdoor pond to simulate water sampling at Sky Meadows

## **Reflection**

**How will reflection be built in to your curriculum and activity(ies)?**

- Comparison of student pre and post surveys
- KWL
- Nature journals responses
- AT surveys and questions generated by students
- Verbally identify birds and flowers while hiking

## **Student Assessment**

**How will you assess student learning? How will you know if they have met the goals for the established outcomes?**

- Compare student post surveys (2009-2010) to compare with pre-survey (2008-2009)
- KWL chart
- Persuasive and descriptive writing
- class discussions
- Next year, same team will visit Sky Meadows again with their 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to apply the foundation laid during this year
- Quality of scrapbook

## **Final Celebration**

**How will you celebrate the success of your unit and share its results with the school and community?**

- Saturday visit to present final scrapbook to be dedicated to Sky Meadows Park
- Contact local newspapers to visit our dedication ceremony for final dedication ceremony
- Feature on LCPS main web page
- PDF downloadable version on school web site
- Additional scrapbook given to Leesburg visitor's center in Loudoun County to promote the AT at Sky Meadows Park

## **Your Evaluation of the Unit**

**How will you evaluate the unit and make note of what worked well and what could be improved? How will you analyze and interpret project outcomes?**

- Student responses both written and verbal
- Nature journals
- Student feedback on end of unit survey
- Discussions with other teachers on our team
- Photographs taken with digital cameras purchased through AT grant money