

One thing about being a teacher here that I have always found amazing is the abundance of field trips the students get to go on, which are part of what we call our "Beyond the Book" experiences. It seems that for every grade and every subject, the school supports the teachers by making it possible (along with the help of our volunteer drivers, of course) for us to take our students wherever we think can help to enrich their education and make it both more fun and fulfilling. I remember that during my three years of middle school, I went on a total of two field trips, and there was a third (the Grade 8 trip to Boston) that I wasn't allowed to go on because of my "advanced" vocabulary and ability to deploy it at the worst possible times. In stark contrast, my 4th-grade student has been on two trips so far, and we've just made it past the first quarter!



Apart from their abundance, the thing I really find amazing about our field trips is that although they are often related to what is happening in the classroom, they absolutely don't have to be. We are allowed to take our students out for opportunities to engage with the community to experience something new, or simply for fun. One of my favorite trips, the Grade 7 two-night trip to Rock Springs Ranch, is one of those.

Although we stop at the Eisenhower Museum and Presidential Library on the way there, the value of the Rock Springs trip lies well outside of the curriculum. At Rock Springs, we just hang out with each other. We play games together, talk and laugh over s'mores, hike around the beautiful grounds, stay up too late stargazing, freak out about spiders and scorpions, and get to know each other better and as more than just students and teachers. We also do a high ropes course which is scary and challenging even to those of us more comfortable with heights, and it is always incredible to hear our students supporting and cheering each other on through their own fear. It is these shared experiences that form the core of that trip, and, year after year, the 7th-grade students come back as more of a unit, more of a team, than they were when they left. Again, although the trip is not firmly rooted in anything curricular, I argue that it could not be more valuable to our students and the dynamic of their class group.

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