



How to carry your outdoor learning materials

So, you're planning on taking your students outside to learn this year! Great!

Here are some ideas for how to take your supplies and materials with you.

Please note that I am not promoting any particular brand, just sharing what the Learning Outside team has found useful.

Whether you want something to carry materials for the whole class or individual 'outside learning kits' for each student, things to consider include:

- size (what do you want to put in it/them; how much storage space do you have)
- ease of carrying
- top/cover so contents are protected from rain/snow - and they can be stacked when not in use
- durability, ease of cleaning

Some ideas for taking class materials outside

(clipboards, bug jars, rulers, pencils, magnifying glasses, etc.)

1. Sturdy plastic totes (e.g. Rubbermaid) are good. For years, we used a blue recycling box, but the handholds were really uncomfortable and the size is awkward, so I suggest you test whatever you're thinking of buying to make sure carrying it won't be too uncomfortable. Maybe make sure the size is such that students can do the carrying! Lids are good for stacking in the classroom and for use outdoors in inclement weather.

2. Fabric totes with straps. We upgraded last year and bought three 'Thirty One' large utility totes (see photo) I'm not promoting this brand, in particular, but many teachers seem to have them, and we like ours. We bought 2 clear tops - realising that when we visit classes, if there's a tote with interesting stuff in it, little hands can't resist! They look nice, can be squashed flat to store, and if you put in side supports, they can be stacked. The carrying straps are long enough that you can throw them over your shoulder. One can buy 'stand tall' inserts, but we re-purposed old campaign-style signs by cutting them to fit the end sides - otherwise the totes slump. For carrying heavier items, one would also want to add support to the bottom, as the bottoms are not well-

supported. Apparently, it is possible to buy totes with a solid bottom. There are also totes with exterior pockets that might be good for holding pencils, rulers, etc. I'm sure you can probably buy similar totes elsewhere. See if you can find one to have a look at before purchasing (always a good idea!).



Tip: *Whatever I use as a tote, I have a tarp that I lay down first to keep all my stuff dry. Even if the ground feels dry, things may get damp if they sit there a while (not a problem with Rubbermaid-type totes, but even water-resistant fabrics will get damp). Also, if it starts to rain/snow, the tarp can be quickly unfolded to cover the top of the 'stuff', as well (of course, one has to remember to do this - says she, speaking from experience, lol).*

Some ideas for individual student kits:

Same basic considerations - it depends on what's going to be in them.

1. Drawstring backpacks (see above photo). We have used these for various activities (for example, hanging them on branches at different 'stations' along a trail or around a schoolyard, each with different things for each particular station). They are readily available from various companies that sell promotional materials.

Advantages:

- inexpensive
- easy to carry
- take up little space when empty
- seem fairly durable (if they have grommets)
- easily hang on pegs or hooks in the classroom
- can add school logo or something else

Possible disadvantage:

- you can't see what's in them (so it would take a while to check to make sure no items were missing - mind you, if each student has their own, keeping track of their pencil, ruler and magnifying glass could be their responsibility)
- however, it is possible to buy clear ones...

2. Grocery store reusable bags (and similar) now come in a variety of sizes now – there may be a smaller size that would meet your needs. These don't have the benefits of being a backpack, but depending on what needs to be carried and how far, that may not matter and the stand-up 'box' shape may be useful.

I hope this is helpful.

See you outside!

Nadine

Learning Outside project director