

Katy Trail Physical Activity Challenge

Purpose: Work as a class or group to log up to 225 miles of physical activity.



Materials

- 1 Katy Trail Challenge map poster for each classroom or group (provided)
- 1 Group Activity Record (master provided)
- Pedometers (1 provided)
- Colored markers

Instructions

- Put up map poster and explain to the students that the Katy Trail is an old railroad track that was converted to a walking / biking trail across the middle of the state. It opened in 1996. Learn more about the Katy Trail at <http://mostateparks.com/park/katy-trail-state-park>. The map poster is marked in 5 mile increments from west to east for a total of 225 miles.
- Decide how you want to do the Challenge
 - How many weeks do you want it to take?
 - Will you complete whole 225 mile trail, or set a shorter distance?
 - Will you track actual miles of activity or do a “virtual journey”?
 - Will you count all the activity of all students in the group, or have one or two children represent the class each day?
 - *Set a goal that is challenging to your class or group!*
- Have students track their physical activity each day. Options:
 - Have 1 or 2 children each day wear a pedometer to track their steps or minutes of activity. Make sure everyone has a chance to participate over the course of the Challenge. **OR**
 - Have all children keep track of and report their activity.
- Have children write their minutes and/or steps on the Group Activity Record.
- If desired, each child can log their minutes of activity on their personal MyActivity Log. You can download or purchase MyActivity Log from University of Missouri Extension at <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/N864>
- Have children use their math skills to convert minutes or steps to miles and mark their progress on the Katy Trail map poster.
- When the group reaches different locations on the Katy Trail map, it’s fun for them to learn about those places. Use the seven Katy Trail history lessons in this toolkit.
- Encourage students and praise them for progress towards goal.

Examples of Ways to Reach Your Goal

Example 1

- If you have an extra pedometer, log activity of 2 students wearing a pedometer each day
- Do the whole 225 mile trail
- If 2 students each log about 2 miles per day (about 30 minutes), that’s 4 miles x 5 school days or 20 miles per week
- This would take 11 to 12 weeks to complete the Challenge

Example 2

- “Virtual Journey”
- Log activity of 1 student wearing a pedometer each day at school
- Choose a different student each day to wear the pedometer
- Count every actual mile of activity as 5 miles on the map, so 45 miles of activity = 225 miles. This is easy to chart because map is marked in 5 mile increments
- If each student logs about 2 actual miles per day, 2 miles x 5 = 10 “virtual miles” x 5 school days = 50 miles per week
- This would take 4 to 5 weeks to complete the Challenge

Example 3

- Log activity of all 25 students in a class
- All students track their activity each day
- If each student logs 2 miles each day, 2 x 25 = 50 miles per day
- You could complete the Challenge in less than a week!

These are only examples. You may come up with another way. The important thing is to set a goal that is challenging but realistic for your group.

Tips for Fun and Success

- Encourage classes or groups to compete with each other. If you have a race to the finish, make sure each group is following the same rules.
- Involve PE teacher
- Plan a special school-wide event like a walkathon or school Olympic Games.
- Take short activity breaks in the classroom (see *Activity Breaks* below)
- Make the most of recess time (see *Playground Activity* below)
- Recruit help from parents or community volunteers
- Adults can set a good example. Have students compete with teachers one day.

Activity Breaks

We have long known the benefits that exercise has on the physical body. We’re now discovering more about the link between movement and learning. Physical activity is essential for student achievement. Studies show a connection between physical activity and increased levels of alertness, mental function and learning. Physical activity increases blood flow to the brain, which brings more oxygen, water, and glucose to feed the brain, while releasing endorphins, which have a positive effect on mood.

Eric Jensen, in *Learning with the Body in Mind*, tells us that sitting for just 10 minutes at a time increases fatigue and reduces concentration and attention. This often results in behavior problems for children. By contrast, most of the brain is activated during physical activity and “the complex interplay between mind and body...engages the learning brain.”

The evidence is fascinating. Rae Pica, a children’s physical activity specialist highlights The Finland Story:

- In Finland, children don’t start formal schooling until they’re seven years old. Until then, they learn through play.

- Once in school, they take a 15-minute break after every 45 minutes of instruction.
- They receive physical education. They also have art and music.
- Finnish students leave school knowing three languages.
- Schooling is such a positive experience for them that there are too many individuals who want to be teachers.
- Finland is #1 in the world in literacy and numeracy!

With limits on recess and PE classes in many schools, it is becoming more difficult for children to get all the physical activity they need. Children should accumulate a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. The good news is that physical activity does not have to be strenuous and does not have to be done all at one time to be beneficial. Getting short bursts of activity adds up.

One way to reach this goal is to take 3 to 5 minute activity breaks in the classroom several times a day. Classroom activity breaks offer students a chance to participate in a fun activity while enjoying social interaction. We recommend taking a classroom activity break after 50 minutes of continuous sitting or during transitions between subjects. Emphasize to the class that the activities usually last 3 to 5 minutes. If time is wasted getting ready, little time will be left for activities.

The following pointers will help you implement classroom activity breaks more efficiently:

- The activities should require a minimum of instruction. Start the activity as quickly as possible. If students don't understand it after a few moments, stop and clarify any issues.
- The idea of the activity is to get children moving in an orderly fashion in the classroom. If some students choose not to participate in an acceptable manner, remove them from the activity. Noise should be minimized.
- Assure that all students are integrated into the activities so they feel an integral part of the class and receive their share of activity.
- PE teacher might be able to help classroom teachers get this started.

Ideas for classroom activity breaks are available from several sources. Here are a few:

- www.jamschoolprogram.com Sign up for JAMmin Minutes, a free one minute exercise routine emailed to you every week. Or download JAMmin Minutes from the past year at <http://www.healthetips.com/archive.php>
- Energizers : Classroom-based Physical Activities Simple and fun ways to integrate physical activity with academic concepts
- www.activeandhealthyschools.com Click on Program Materials to order laminated classroom activity cards and more.
- www.extension.missouri.edu/explore/shop Product # N862 is a set of over 70 laminated physical activity cards developed by the University of Missouri Extension Family Nutrition Education Program.

Playground Activity

Meeting the goals of the Katy Trail Challenge will require more than just classroom activity breaks and PE classes. Students need to be active on the playground! Remind them every time they go out, they need to play towards their activity goal!

Suggestions for encouraging playground activity:

- Change your terminology. Refer to recess as “Activity Time” and the playground as “Activity Zone.”
- Create and mark separate zones for specific activities to improve safety and encourage a variety of activities.
- Offer a learning zone to teach new games.
- Train upper grade students to serve as Activity Promotion Aides for younger students.
- Create a walking/jogging trail around the perimeter of the Activity Zone and mark distances so students can track their mileage.

A Note about overweight students – Walking is probably the activity of choice for overweight students. It’s easy on the joints, doesn’t overly stress the cardiovascular system, and is not painful. The old saying “no pain, no gain” is nonsense for these students. Many have already been turned off to physical activity because of negative past experiences. Rekindling the joy of activity for these students takes an encouraging and kind approach. Walking is usually their choice of activity, and when coupled with pedometers can ignite a new interest in staying active.

Fit Fact - On many playgrounds, fewer than 30% of students are actively engaged.

Quick Tip - Walking doesn’t require any equipment, has a low injury rate and is an activity that continues into adulthood.

Optional Resources for Physical Activity

Calculating Stride Length lesson plan (on CD)

How to Use a Pedometer (on CD)

Converting Steps to Miles (on CD)

