

Project Report: Environmental Education Loan Boxes

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Submitted by:

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Introduction:

It is the mission of the Anita Purves Nature Center to serve the community by promoting the wise stewardship of the natural environment by fostering appreciation, understanding and responsible use of the earth. The Nature Center offers environmental programs for individuals of all ages and has served as an environmental resource center for educators in central Illinois since 1979. The Center operates a reference and lending library containing books on natural history and environmental issues, slide/tape programs, topical loan boxes, videos, natural history items, curriculum guides, posters, games and cassette tapes.

The staff at the Anita Purves Nature Center is continually looking for new materials to update the environmental resource center maintained at the Nature Center. Educational boxes are available for loan to educators wishing to integrate special topics into their regular curriculum.

Loan Boxes are self-contained teaching units complete with natural objects, pictures, reference books, equipment and activities. They are designed for the busy teacher who is looking for ways to get students involved with the environment without exhaustive research or expensive field trips. Currently the Nature Center has 22 boxes on 18 different topics, including prairie, birds, insects, mammals, rainforests, dinosaurs, trees, marine life, geology, worms & composting, turtles/reptiles, wolves, habitats, plants & seeds, ponds, endangered species, tracks, and astronomy. The boxes are primarily geared towards primary levels. A few boxes are currently available to upper grade levels (through 8th grade), but have not been used by secondary educators.

In the past few years the Nature Center staff have worked on updating and replacing materials in the aforementioned boxes. During that same time we have seen loan box usage increase significantly, as demonstrated in the graph below.

Year	# of times boxes rented	Total # of students reached
1996-97	18	378
1997-98	50+	1,000+
1998-99	70+	1,500+

Numbers for the 1990-2000 school year appear to be right on track with the previous years. By maintaining and expanding the amount of quality resources available, we can ensure these boxes will continue to be used by a high number of educators for years to come.

Due to recently expressed interest by secondary level educators for resources, the Nature Center staff decided to create two new loan boxes geared towards the 6th – 12th grade levels. Each box would contain information and materials encouraging the in-depth study of two natural areas, the prairie and woodlands.

The prairie box is designed to encourage appreciation of the prairie habitat through identification of the various plant and animal species present, their adaptations to the prairie, and their natural history including benefits to humans using a pre-designed interdisciplinary curriculum.

The woodland box is intended to focus on monitoring and awareness through the seasons. For example, materials will be included to encourage tree and leaf identification in the fall, bird watching and animal signs in the winter, and vernal pond and woodland wildflower identification in the spring. Again, the woodland box will contain interdisciplinary activities – not just those focusing on science.

Each box will have pre-set curriculum and corresponding materials that educators can use to study local natural areas throughout the seasons. For example, educators will be encouraged to do a prairie soil study. Materials for creating a Berlese Funnel, as called for in the activity, will be included in the box. Supplementary curriculum guides (i.e. Project Learning Tree's *Focus on Forests* and *Forest Ecology*), slide sets, posters, field guides and other materials will be included in each box as well. The boxes will also contain information regarding enhancement of local sites, outreach and volunteer projects, and sources for funding such as the Audubon Society and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Summary of Expenses

Please see attached.

Timeline for Implementation & Advertising:

The majority of materials for the boxes have been obtained. The remaining materials and activity write-ups will be completed by August 31, 2000. The boxes will be available for use by September 2000.

Flyers detailing Nature Center services available to secondary-level teachers will be distributed to all local schools. A note on the fliers and in the loan boxes will give credit to the Champaign County Audubon Society and Illinois Department of Natural Resources for making the funds available to complete the boxes.

Method of Evaluation:

Evaluation forms will be included in the boxes for any comments and feedback by the educators.