



Zoo School Handbook

Chevron Open Minds Program

Table of Contents

- I. Welcome and Introduction to the Open Minds Program and Zoo School
- II. Planning and Preparing for Zoo School
- III. Your Week at the Zoo
- IV. Preparing Yourself and Your Students for Zoo School
- V. Zoo Resources, Supplies, and Journals
- VI. Bussing, Forms, Payment, and Other Information
- VII. Supervision, Volunteers, and Behavior Expectations
- VIII. Thank-you Letters, Program Evaluation, Letters of Support, and Samples of Student Work

I. Welcome to Zoo School!

We look forward to having you and your class at Zoo School. We know it will be an adventure you won't forget! Your week at Zoo School will provide you and your students with a wealth of first-hand experiences and memories. The connections you make to the week throughout the year will make the whole experience very rich. Every week is different, depending on the major focus each teacher wishes to develop. Your proposal shows that much thought has already been given to this program. We hope to help you in your journey of planning and developing your ideas for Zoo School with this information package, the in-services, planning meetings, and our CC/OM workshop sessions. Chevron Zoo School is one of many programs offered at the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo to help the Zoo fulfil its purpose and vision.

Our Purpose | Why We Exist

We act for wildlife; saving species and inspiring people to join us.

Our Vision | What We are Striving to Create

Our vision is a future where people and wildlife thrive, together.

Chevron Canada Resources provides funding for the Chevron Open Minds Program. This project involves programming at two sites around Calgary including the Calgary Zoo and Telus Spark Science Centre. Zoo School is made possible by a partnership between Chevron Canada Resources and the Calgary Zoological Society.



II. Planning and Preparing for Zoo School

You have already begun the planning process by completing your Zoo School application and thinking about your big question/big idea. Your week at Zoo School is meant to be just one part of a larger plan, which should also include many other experiences (such as in-class projects, guest speakers, literature, and journaling). The plan can be developed for a long-term study or can even become the focus for your entire school year. Plans are not set in stone and may need to be modified for class needs or if you have a new idea.

- A. **Welcome Session/Spring In-Service (June 12)** – This will introduce you to the Calgary Zoo and the Chevron Zoo School program.
- B. **Summer Teacher In-service (Aug 22)** – This full day will give you a chance to take part in some of the experiences your class may choose to do during their week at the zoo.
- C. **“Big picture” Planning Meeting** – This is held with the Zoo School Coordinator and a member of the Campus Calgary/Open Minds Operations Team approximately 6-8 weeks before your Zoo School week. The goal of this meeting is to look at your year plan and think about entry points in your curriculum where Zoo School related ideas might fit. We will discuss suggestions for inquiry and investigations during your Zoo School week and begin to construct a schedule. The final schedule will be sent to you by the Zoo School Coordinator once everything has been planned out at the zoo.
- D. **School Visit** – A Zoo School Ambassador will visit your school the week before you come to the Zoo. The Zoo School Ambassador will talk to your students about “Zoo Etiquette”, review how to prepare for Zoo School, do some journaling activities, tell stories, and answer student questions. We will propose a time and date for your Zoo School Ambassador to come to your school at the beginning of the year to allow you to plan around this crucial visit. If anything changes throughout the year, we can rearrange the date, however please contact the Zoo School Ambassador immediately to let them know. **When we hire a second Zoo School Coordinator, we will figure out exactly what the Zoo School Ambassador visit will look like.**

III. Your Week at the Zoo

Each class that comes to Zoo School will have a unique week that will be developed around the individual teacher’s long-term plans and, ideally, student interest. When planning your week, we will consider the following:

A. **Core Programs/Activities During the Week**

- **Focussed Animal Observation Time** – Zoo School offers your students an opportunity to discover the true meaning of “observation.” We set aside time each day for focussed observation around that supports your big idea and/or student questions. This activity allows students to improve observation, sketching and writing skills, examine an issue or question



more deeply, and make connections to previous learning. It can also help them to see real-world applications that relate to your big idea - a truly vital part in developing the students' future ideas and beliefs about conservation. Once your students have chosen their animals for observation, it is advised that students do some research on their animals before their week. Before you begin your research, **check with the Zoo School Coordinator** when selecting animals for observations. **Please also have your students organized into observation groups before you come.**

- **Behind the Scenes** – Each class is given the unique opportunity of having a special, up-close encounter with one of our animals. This is also a chance to hear from a member of our Animal Care team. Schedules for these are arranged in advance and are determined by our Animal Care team, so we are unable to fill special requests made by schools.
- **Zoo Expert** – The zoo is full of experts. We have horticulturists who can point out the amazing plants in the conservatory. We have habitat designers who can speak to all factors to consider when building an animal's home. We have conservation researchers who work in the field with animals we are trying to re-introduce into the wild. You can pick an expert who might speak most to your big question, or maybe there's something you're personally really interested in. This also gives students an opportunity to practice coming up with meaningful questions.
- **Animal Encounter** – This is a wonderful opportunity for students to learn about the one of the Calgary Zoo's ambassador animals. Zoo staff will bring out an animal for a 15-minute visit to share some natural history of the animal.
- **Teacher Led Portions** – Is there something that you want to take the lead on? Maybe you want to have a colour hunt through part of the zoo. Maybe you want to the students to find art pieces around the zoo. Maybe you want to do a sound map inside one of the buildings. Remember to use the zoo as much as possible when developing ideas. Activities that are classroom-based can always be completed at your school.
- **Blank Sections** – We will purposely leave some portions of the week blank, often on the last day, to be filled in during the week depending on teacher and student interest. This also creates flexibility for inclement weather and other unforeseen scenarios.

IV. Preparing Yourself and Your Students for Zoo School

A. Pre-Zoo School Activities

For you to make the best use of your time at the Zoo, students should have developed certain skills and a knowledge base before they come to Zoo School. Here are some examples:

- Journaling is an important skill that is developed with experience. In their journals, students can record their observations, draw, and write reflectively about their experiences. This is an

extremely useful part of the students' learning. Students should begin using their journals well before their week at the zoo.

- Observation skills and techniques should be practiced in the classroom. Doing preliminary observations before coming to the Zoo greatly increases the quality of observations. This could be done with animals around the school yard, or in the classroom using live cams from other zoos. Techniques such as "I notice, I wonder, it reminds me of..." and "I see, I think, I wonder" are good starting points.
- Sketching skills as a tool for recording observations. There are many resources online for this, but John Muir Laws' website (<https://johnmuirlaws.com/nature-journaling-starting-growing/>) is one of the best. Remind students they don't need to be an "artist" to draw, that they should just try their best and know they'll get better the more they practice.
- Walking. Go on nature walks near your school. Go for walks through the hallways with your journals. Walk outside in all weather. Practice using their journals as they walk. The students will be doing a lot of walking at the zoo, so it's good to get their stamina up.
- Animal research on animals at the zoo or animals that the Wilder Institute works to protect helps students connect with the animals before they've even arrived.
- Environment and Conservation – The zoo is a great way to connect kids to the environment. This is a great entry point to look at how we interact with our environment, how the environment affects us, and how we affect the environment.

B. Zoo School Week Checklists

You and your students will want to come prepared for the weather and a variety of activities during the week:

Student List (all things of value should be labeled)

- pencils, pencil sharpeners and erasers
- observation journals
- water bottles
- appropriate clothing (we will be outside in all weather)
- **camera (optional and should have limits around use)**
- Lunches and snacks (remind students not to bring lunches that need a microwave)

*****We recommend that students do not bring money for food or the gift shops.*****

Teacher List

- Open Minds media release forms (student and parent). These will be provided at your planning meeting.
- Student health forms. Teachers are responsible for being aware of any health concerns. During Zoo School, you should have emergency numbers and Alberta Health Care numbers for each child. These do not need to be given to the Zoo School Coordinator, but they should be brought with you in case of an emergency. **If there are any children with nut or other severe allergies, please advise the coordinator.**
- Art supplies and school supplies as you require
- Parent information, supplies, and journals



- Camera (optional)
- Your teacher journal to document the week alongside your students

V. Zoo Resources, Supplies, and Journals

Zoo Resources

- **Savannah Classroom** - This on-site classroom is available exclusively for your class all week. Washrooms, tables and chairs, a large white board, carpeted gathering area (for grades 5 and younger), sink, kettle and mugs, and basic supplies such as scissors and rulers are available. There is a large tv with a laptop and internet connectivity. **Name tags** are available to students for the duration of the week. There is no water fountain in the classroom, but there is potable water from the taps. Remind students to bring water bottles with them. We also have recycling and composting available.
- **Zoo School Coordinator** - The Zoo School Coordinator will work with you as a team teacher and resource person. The Coordinator is involved with facilitating learning opportunities as requested by you, is a resource for you and your students, and will also be involved in planning, booking programs, and scheduling. The Zoo School Coordinator also has access to biofacts (examples of biological materials/articles that have come from animals, plants and nature), which may be useful for certain activities and programs.

School Supplies, Art Supplies

- School supplies, copies, and other materials are not included in the Zoo School fee. Teachers should ensure all students come prepared for Zoo School and should bring all necessary materials for the week. A zip lock bag for each group works wonders to keep these all together.

Notebooks/Journals/Observation books

- Students should have a special journal to use prior to and during their week at the Zoo. This book can be used at school for sketching, vocabulary, observation skill development, journaling, etc. The journal will be used at the zoo to record observations, for journal writing, drawing, keeping a copy of their week schedule, etc. Group leaders (parent volunteers) should also have a journal to use while at the Zoo. One journal to consider is: **VISUAL JOURNAL SKETCHBOOKS**, from Topline. These can be ordered in two sized 8.5" X 11" and 5.5 X 8.5, with a hard cover and coil bound (shopburke.ca/category/VisualJournal)

VI. Bussing, Forms, Payment and Other Information

A. Buses

The cost of the bus and the booking of the bus is looked after by Zoo School. **First Student** is the bussing company and the Zoo School Coordinator makes all of the arrangements with First Student. Times for pick up from the school and from the zoo have already been picked. If you want to change these times, or if you have special requirements for bussing (e.g., need a wheelchair accessible bus), contact the Zoo School Coordinator. Times for bussing will be confirmed at your Zoo School Planning meeting.



B. Field Trip Forms

Teachers are required to complete all of the forms as required by their school board.

Information to help you complete the forms and a service provider contract will be provided at the planning meeting.

C. Payment

For this school year, the cost for the week is \$1500, and \$1800 for independent schools. For an average class of 25 students, that's \$60/student or \$12/day for the program. This fee includes bussing and professional development for you throughout the year in the form of in-person and virtual workshops, as well as support from the coordinator. The coordinator will provide a **quote letter** for payment at the planning meeting and payment can be made via credit card only.

D. Parent Information and Media Release Forms

An information sheet and media release form will be provided to you by the coordinator at the planning meeting. These need to be copied and sent home well ahead of time. The Media Release form for students and parents should be **signed and returned to the Zoo School Coordinator on the first day of Zoo School**. This allows us to use video footage, pictures, and written works from different classes to promote the Chevron Open Minds Program. Please inform the Zoo School Coordinator if you have not received all of the forms or students/adults do not give consent.

E. Emergencies

Many staff, including your Zoo School Coordinator, have First Aid training. A First Aid kit is located in the Savannah classroom. First Aid is also available from Security staff. In the case of very urgent family emergencies only, children, teachers, leaders, and volunteers can be contacted through the Security Office at 403-232-9341. Since we are at different locations in the Zoo, contact information for the Zoo School Coordinator while on site will be provided at the planning meeting.

VII. Supervision, Volunteers, and Behavior Expectations

A. Teacher Supervision

The Savannah classroom is considered your classroom for the week. Teacher responsibility with respect to class supervision, safety, and discipline is the same as your regular school. Classroom management and classroom atmosphere is created by each individual teacher.

B. Volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the program as the zoo is a very large place! The students will normally be divided into five observation groups, and **a volunteer is recommended for each group each day**. In the past, some schools have had difficulty finding enough volunteers, so start recruiting early in the year. It is best if you can meet with the volunteers and discuss their role beforehand. Having them attend the student orientation with the Zoo Ambassador the week before Zoo School would be useful. It is also best if the volunteer leaders can be with the group for the entire week, but this is not necessary. Observation journals (the same ones that the children have) should also



be made available to the volunteers so they can model journaling and be active participants during observation time.

C. Student Behavioral Expectations While at the Zoo

The Zoo is home to many species of exciting and interesting plants and animals. All of us, including Zoo staff and visitors, are guests within the animals' "homes" and our behaviour while at the Zoo is a reflection of our respect for them. Considering the nature of our facility, **teachers and leaders must set up expectations and standards of behaviour for students** while at the Zoo. The following is a review of "Zoo Etiquette" and behaviours while on Zoo Grounds. This information will be reviewed during the in-class presentation by our Zoo School Ambassador.

Zoo Etiquette

Zoo Etiquette means showing respect for the animals, which helps them to feel more comfortable in their home. By following Zoo etiquette, the animals feel more comfortable, but the students will also be rewarded. Your students will see behaviour which the animals display only when they feel comfortable. This can make for an unforgettable experience!

- Be respectful to the animals by not yelling at, roaring at, teasing, or imitating the animals (e.g., howling at the wolves, roaring at the lions)
- Please don't tap on the glass as this disturbs the animals inside.
- Keep your voices down inside the buildings.
- **Walk** to your destinations around the Zoo.

With over 10,000 visitors a day in our peak season, Zoo school students also need to be aware that they share this terrific facility with others Zoo visitors, and certain areas can be extremely crowded. There are also a number of parents, toddlers, and babies in strollers on the Zoo grounds, and students should be considerate of them.

Cooperation with Zoo Staff, helping maintain a clean space, and showing respect for the animals will create a positive atmosphere for all visitors.

Unacceptable Behaviours

The following behaviours are considered unacceptable. Please discuss these with your students before entering the Zoo.

- Running, tapping on glass, climbing fences, throwing things into the enclosure, making loud noises, or disrupting the animals in any way.
- Students should be aware that chasing or feeding any of the animals at the Zoo can seriously affect the animals' health and will not be tolerated.



VIII. Thank You's, Program Evaluation, Letters of Support and Samples of Student Work

After your students have had such a fulfilling educational experience, creating gestures of thanks offers them an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings. Sending thank you letters/videos/artwork to Chevron and acknowledging their sponsorship of the program is very important. Letters to Chevron and the other supporters and/or Zoo staff and volunteers can be sent to the Zoo School Coordinator and will be forwarded to the appropriate people. We would also appreciate receiving examples of student work that we can use in displays, our annual reports and/or show to other teachers. Teachers will be asked to submit an evaluation of the program upon completion of their week. Thank you in advance for these contributions!

We look forward to working with you this year and to building a strong and positive learning experience for both you and your students!