

Key Components of the BIG Lesson Programs© 2021-22

The BIG Lesson is a study trip that spans five consecutive days at a community site. Teachers and students immerse themselves in learning for a full week of in-depth study, working with experts on site, followed by teacher-led lessons and reinforced with independent observation and research time.

- **BIG Zoo Lesson**© at Potter Park Zoo, Lansing, Binder Park Zoo, Battle Creek, and John Ball Zoo, Grand Rapids
- **Annie's BIG Nature Lesson**© at Woldumar, Fenner, Bengel, Lincoln Brick and Harris Nature Centers, Lansing, Kalamazoo Nature Center, Kalamazoo, Seven Ponds Nature Center, Dryden, Dahlem Conservancy, Jackson, Wilder Creek Conservation Club, Marshall, and Leslie Science and Nature Center, Ann Arbor
- **BIG History Lesson**© at Michigan Historical Museum, Lansing, Meridian Historic Village, Okemos, and Lakeshore Museum, Muskegon
- **BIG Science Lesson**© at Impression 5 Science Center, Lansing, and in community and mining sites in Calumet and the Keweenaw Peninsula

Key components of The BIG Lesson are:

- **Ongoing, sustained professional development for teachers:**
 - Teachers participate in training to learn about Teaching in Informal Settings, Integrated Thematic Study, Science Process, Object-Based Learning, Visual Note-taking, Multiple Intelligences, Inquiry Methods for Learning, Engaging Parents in the Learning Process.
 - Teachers receive continuous support throughout the school year to design and implement thematic study for students.
 - Training is correlated with curriculum, for an interdisciplinary approach to lesson design.
- **Lessons are teacher-led and student-centered:**
 - Teacher and Big Lesson director work together to design the week's lessons. Responsibility for teaching students is shared by teacher and zoo people (zoo docents, education staff).
 - Each day on site includes an expert lesson; teacher-led lessons to reinforce the expert/docent lesson; an independent observation/research time for students.
 - Lessons include presentations by site experts (zookeeper, education staff, docents), teacher-led lessons, and follow-up lessons to help students incorporate information they are learning each day.
 - Teachers design lessons that are correlated with Core Curriculum and match the way students learn.
- **Extended time**
 - Extended time is the key for immersion into the natural world and making sense of the deep knowledge they are gaining at the zoo.
 - Students choose one animal to observe and use an hour each day for independent study time to observe, write, and draw.
- **Parent involvement**
 - Parents learn along with students and assist in leading small groups of students.
 - Teachers provide information or training for parents before The BIG Lesson week so that parents are comfortable in their expanded role with students.
- **Year-long themes**
 - Teachers use the zoo as their classroom for the week, changing the concept of "field trip" to "study trip".
 - The week serves as a catalyst for year-long thematic study.
 - Personal connections build for the teacher, students, and parents as the year unfolds.

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