

Geocaching with School Age Children: Let the Treasure Hunting Begin!

- ▶ Presenter: Suzanne Otte
- ▶ Program Supervisor-Garden Grove Child Care
- ▶ seekersuzie on geocaching.com

Take a moment to imagine...

It's a beautiful fall day. The adventurers have just set out on their latest search. They take turns leading the group down the well worn path in the quiet, colorful forest. They were finally nearing the end of their journey. With one last turn, the explorers emerge into the clearing. Pausing, they carefully check their coordinates and scan the area for anything that may look out of place. With a quick glance around to be sure they aren't being watched, the adventurers head for a small pile of rocks that looks very suspicious. Carefully, they slide a loose stone to one side, revealing the treasure they had been seeking! "I wonder what's inside?" one of them whispers.



I would like to welcome you all to the world of geocaching, the real life adventure game that lets you hunt for hidden treasure!

Why Geocache with School Age Children?

- ▶ We are all intrigued by the hunt for "lost treasure".
- ▶ Children have a natural attraction to the adventure in hiding and seeking something-for example: Easter eggs hunts, scavenger hunts, I Spy Games, and playing hide and seek.
- ▶ Geocaching allows us to utilize the latest technology in navigation and use computers and the internet; a great combination in a world where children grow up playing video games and operating computers.
- ▶ Many caches are educational and are closely linked to regional history or geological features.
- ▶ Many geocaches involve solving puzzles or clues to discover the coordinates for the placement of the geocache.
- ▶ Many geocaches have been hidden by children (with parental help) for other children to find.
- ▶ Geocaching is fun, it gets you to enjoy the outdoors, and exploring and hunting for hidden "treasures" as you learn a new skill!
- ▶ Geocaching encourages children to explore their surroundings, use observational skills and have an adventure right in their own neighborhood.
- ▶ The potential benefits of geocaching can be immense-physical, social, educational (history, geography, social studies, math and science).

Things to keep in mind when teaching school age children to geocache...

- ▶ Do your homework-make sure you have learned how to use the GPS receiver first. Check out the geocaching.com and the mbgeocaching.com websites-there is a ton of resources and information on these sites. Go out and find a few geocaches on your own before venturing out with a group of children.
- ▶ Start by learning how to use a compass and doing some activities with directions-North, South, East, and West. Do some scavenger hunts and make treasure maps. Have them make their own geocaches.
- ▶ Start out by hiding a couple of the children's geocaches around the playground for children to find-give them all a chance to use the GPS taking turns and trading off after approximately 100 meters or so. Remind them to be aware of their surroundings, not to focus entirely on the GPS receiver.
- ▶ When going out to look for official geocaches check the logs to make sure it has been found recently-it would be a good idea to find the first couple of them on your own first, and then take a group of children. Keep the first few simple. Once you are within about 8 meters, put the GPS away and have the children use their eyes!
- ▶ Geocaching works best with 5-8 children, but can be done with more if you prepare them ahead of time.
- ▶ Really stress that they need to be in "stealth-like mode" and to watch out for muggles-(non-geocachers).
- ▶ There is a whole list of geo-lingo such as FTF-first to find, TFTC!-thanks for the cache, TNLN-took nothing left nothing, etc.

Who Geocaches?

People from all age groups can participate in geocaching, including individuals, families with children, students, adults and retirees.

Over five million people worldwide participate in geocaching. Geocaching is a great way to explore locations near and far, it brings friends and family together to enjoy the outdoors, and it can be challenging. Geocache containers come in all shapes and sizes. They are often quite cleverly camouflaged.

All geocaches contain a logbook or logsheet for participants to sign. Larger containers can also contain items for trade, usually toys or trinkets of little monetary value. You are welcome to take an item from the cache as long as you leave something of equal or greater value in its place so that there's something there for the next geocacher to find.

Geocaches may also contain Trackables. These are geocaching "game pieces" that have a unique tracking code that allows geocachers to follow the items' real-world travels on Geocaching.com. The owners of the trackable give the items travel-related goals. You do not need to trade anything for a Trackable, but if you take one, you should be willing to help it on its journey.



Types of Geocaches...

There are a number of geocache types. The main ones include:

Traditional Cache-The original geocache that consists of at least a container and a logbook, may also contain tradable items. Coordinates listed give the cache's exact location.

Multi-cache-A multi-cache involves two or more locations. Hints found at the initial location lead to the final geocache.

? Mystery or Puzzle Cache- These caches can involve complicated puzzles you will first need to solve to determine the coordinates of the cache.

There are also event caches and cache in trash out caches.

Geocaching at Garden Grove Child Care-How it all began...

- ▶ Seekersuzie introduced the staff of GGCC to geocaching in the spring of 2010 at our staff retreat at The Forks. After having fun searching for and finding some geocaches we all agreed that this would be a great activity to introduce to the children of GGCC.
- ▶ In the summer program of 2010 the children participated in a mini-workshop on geocaching, and then they put together their own geocaches. They took turns hiding and searching for them out on the playground.
- ▶ Then we started to look for geocaches around the child care neighborhood. We started searching for geocaches while we were out on field trips. Pretty soon everywhere we went, children would ask if there were any geocaches there. Our two favorite places to geocache were the Zoo and Oak Hammock Marsh.

What the children liked about geocaching...

- ▶ "We get to use the GPS!"
- ▶ "There's lots of cool toys in them!"
- ▶ "Going out into Nature!"
- ▶ "Trading stuff for things I like."
- ▶ "Finding the geocache on the duck decoy."
- ▶ "When we went to Living Prairie Museum and our group found the hardest one-the one in the tree branch hole."
- ▶ "Following the path, going through the tall grass and finding the geocache in the tree."

What staff liked about geocaching...

- ▶ "The adventure and the adrenaline and the satisfaction of finding it!"
- ▶ "The excitement of opening it up and seeing what's inside!"
- ▶ "When we were successful and found geocaches."
- ▶ "It's very adventurous and it's a lot of fun!"
- ▶ "I love the places that geocaching has brought me to, and the challenges of finding some cleverly hidden ones!"



Our Travel Bug:

We launched our travel buddy Baby Nacho while on a field trip at Oak Hammock Marsh in August of 2011. He was picked up and moved to a geocache just outside of Calgary. He is currently traveling in Alberta. We are able to track his travels on the geocaching website.



Making Geocaches for the Interlake Pioneer Trail...Future Geocaching Power Trail!

In the summer of 2011, we were very fortunate to be a part of this project with the South Interlake ATV Club and Interlake Tourism. The children helped to put together, name, and make personalized first to find certificates for 15 geocaches along this trail. Our goal is to be able to get out to the trail with the children to search for some of the geocaches they developed.



Some comments made by geocachers who found our geocaches...

- ▶ “The custom made FTF certificates are terrific.”
- ▶ “Great title, whichever of the kids who helped you with the caches came up with it. TFTC”
- ▶ “Geocaching is a fun family activity and a great way for kids to get involved is by creating their own caches. Great job kids!!”
- ▶ “This is what it’s all about. Great trail, good exercise and easy caches☺”
- ▶ “Geocaching along the Interlake Pioneer Trail...What a great way to make the most of a beautiful fall day!”
- ▶ “Thank you for a nice place to explore.”
- ▶ “I love the custom made FTF certificates in the caches that I was fortunate enough to be FTF on. The children did a great job on this cache and all the other ones they were involved in.”
- ▶ “Thank the children of GGCC for me. The custom made FTF certificates are great, along with the caches. I was having a lot of fun this morning finding the caches along the trail.”



Websites and Resources...

- ▶ geocaching.com
- ▶ mbgeocaching.com
- ▶ geocachingkids.com
- ▶ landsharkz.ca
- ▶ Complete Idiot’s Guide to Geocaching-The Editors and Staff of Geocaching.com
- ▶ Maps and Mapping for Canadian Kids-Laura Peetoom & Paul Heersink
- ▶ GPS: Global Positioning System-Jeanne Sturm
- ▶ There’s a Map on My Lap-Tish Rabe
- ▶ The Once Upon a Time Map Book-B.G. Hennessy
- ▶ www.thompsonspiritway.ca

Some Great Places to Geocache with Children...

- ▶ Oak Hammock Marsh
- ▶ Kildonan Park
- ▶ Assiniboine Park
- ▶ The Zoo
- ▶ Little Mountain Park
- ▶ Fort Whyte Nature Centre
- ▶ Kilcona Park
- ▶ St. Vital Park
- ▶ Birds Hill Park
- ▶ Living Prairie Museum
- ▶ Lower Fort Garry
- ▶ The Forks



GPS Historical Tours

Old St. Boniface GPS Adventures

- ▶ Tourisme Riel offers themed GPS tours (with rental GPS; if you've never used one before they will also show you how it works).
- ▶ Several caches have been placed in intriguing places in Old St. Boniface.
- ▶ Call (204) 233-8343 for details.

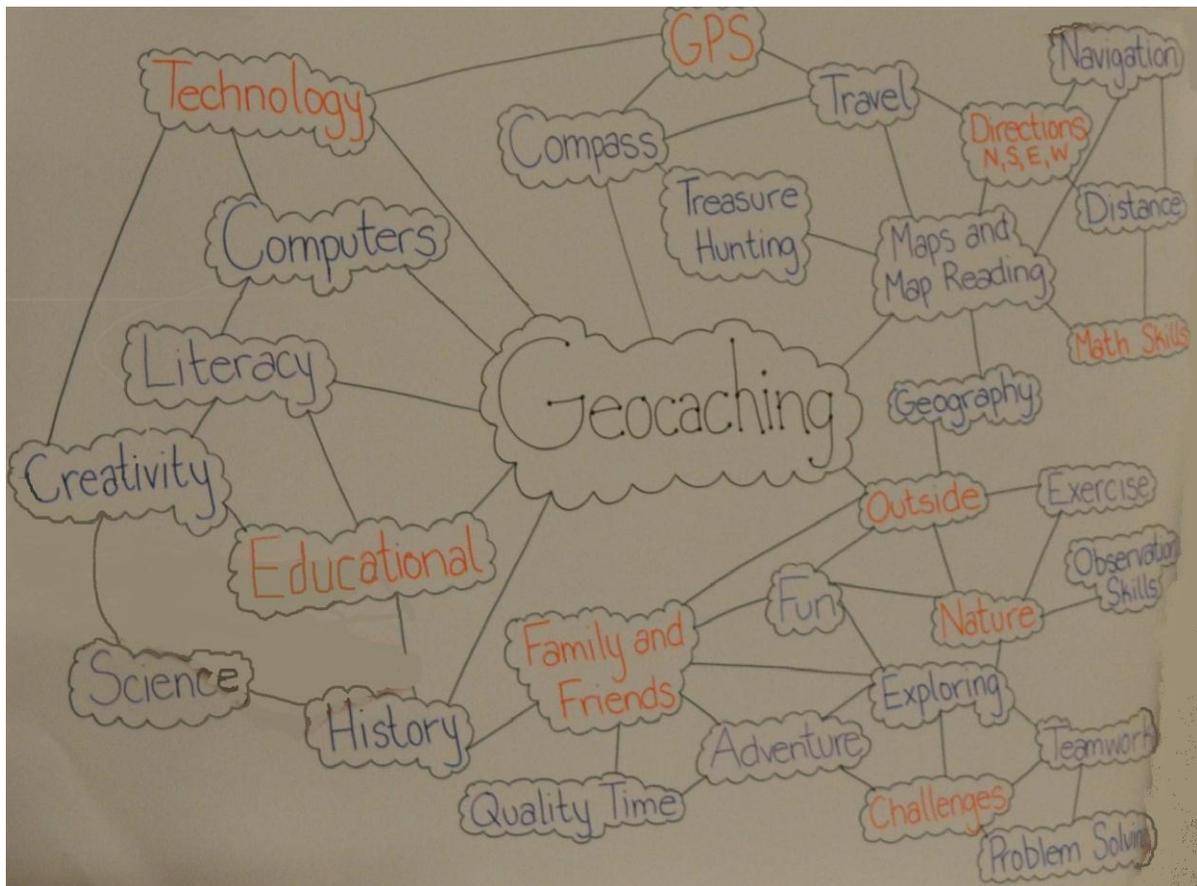
Cache Me if you Can

- ▶ Grab a GPS and use it to solve a history mystery in the Cache Me if you Can geo-cache walking tour of The Forks.
- ▶ There are three mysteries to choose from:
 - ▶ · **Rails to Riches** will appeal to train-buffs
 - ▶ · **Furs, Forts & Fast Food** - an unlikely but fun combo
 - ▶ · **Broken Heartland** - is history brought to life
- ▶ In this twist on the self-guided tour, you rent the GPS and get a booklet of help and hints with clues leading to a hidden geo-cache.
- ▶ This is a great outdoor activity for kids over age 9 and teens as well as adults.
- ▶ Rent your geocaching kit at Explore Manitoba Centre at [The Forks](#).
- ▶ Offered June to Labour Day, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Parks Canada Kiosk.
- ▶ Info at (204) 983-6757.

There is also the the "Spirit Way GPS Wolf Hunt"-ever notice those painted wolfs around Winnipeg? If you go to www.thompsonspiritway.ca you can find the coordinates for the eleven wolves that can be found in Winnipeg. The "Bears on Broadway" bears are also located at various businesses throughout the city.

Last Words of Wisdom...

- ▶ If you decide to try this in your child care programs, please remember to incorporate the proper geocaching etiquette-if you take something, leave something of equal or greater value, make sure you put the geocache back where you found it, and stress the stealth mode so that non-geocachers will not find the cache.
- ▶ Promote safe, responsible and environmentally friendly geocaching.
- ▶ “Joy is found not in finishing an activity, but in doing it.”-Greg Anderson
- ▶ And remember, experiences you have during the **Journey** are often more important than reaching the destination!
- ▶ I believe that geocaching is a great way to help children and adults re-connect with nature, something we all need to be doing. Research shows that people who are allowed to explore outdoors are socially and emotionally happier and healthier.
- ▶ I have created a curriculum web to illustrate all the learning outcomes that can be associated with geocaching. The possibilities are endless...



- ▶ “Do not go where the path leads; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thank you and good luck on your own geocaching adventures!!

Some other activities to try:

How to Use a Compass

What You'll Need:

- Orienteering-style compass with degree markings (such as a Silva compass)
- Map of your local area or area of interest

Step 1: To align a compass, read the directions for the compass and learn which end of the needle points north.

Step 2: Turn the compass until the north arrow on the compass's face is aligned with the north end of the pointer. You are now aligned "north." Observe the letters on the compass: N is north, E is east, S is south, W is west. Northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest will also be present.

Step 3: Next, look at the numbers. These are degrees, another form of measuring compass direction.

Step 4: Turn and face any direction. Hold one hand out flat and place the compass on your palm. Point the arrow on the baseplate in the direction you're facing.

Step 5: Turn the dial on the compass until the north-facing arrow is aligned with the pointer. Now read the degree mark that the index line crosses. This is your direction in degrees.

Step 6: To find your bearing, place the map on the ground and find where you want to start and end. Place the compass so that it matches both points. Turn the dial until "north" points the same direction as the north indicator on the map. The index on the baseplate should now line up with the correct bearing on the dial. Turn the compass in the correct direction.

Cardinal Points

Materials: compass, start marker (could be a flag, a ball, anything), spacious field or room

Goal: To learn how to use a compass, girls should have basic knowledge of the cardinal points (N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, and NW). This game requires basic knowledge of the cardinal points while using a compass.

Instructions: Select a starting point. Drop the start marker and using the compass follow these directions:

Walk 5 paces to the north, stop

Walk 10 paces to the West, stop

Walk 20 paces to the south, stop

Walk 15 paces to the east, stop

Walk 15 paces to the north, stop

Walk 5 paces to the west, stop. At this point, look down on the ground. You should be at the starting point!

Puzzle Treasure Hunt

Materials: plastic egg, puzzle (about 25 pieces that fit in the egg), treasure

Instructions:

1. Choose a puzzle about 25 pieces or smaller depending on the age of the children.
2. Put the puzzle together.
3. Flip it over and write the clue to the location of the treasure.
4. Take the puzzle apart and put the puzzle pieces into plastic eggs (make sure your pieces are not too big for your eggs).
5. Depending on how long you want the hunt to be, you might put more than 1 piece in each egg).
6. When all the eggs were collected, the kids put the puzzle together and flip it over and read the location or a clue to figure out the location of the treasure.
7. Solve the clue and find the treasure!

Variations

1. Divide the kids into 3 teams (Bunnies, Duckies and Chickies or whatever you want to call them). Have 3 puzzles and 3 treasures in 3 different locations. Chose 2 colors of plastic eggs for each team, so the Bunnies would hunt for blue and purple eggs, Duckies orange and yellow and so on.
2. Hide "half and half eggs", blue and yellow egg, purple and orange egg, etc. Anyone could collect these eggs and keep what was inside.