



**Meitheamh – Fócas ar rianta**

*Paddy Madden continues his series of SESE tips*

# June

## Zoom in on trails

**Background information**

A trail is an organised or structured walk for the purpose of observing and exploring different aspects of the built and natural environment. It focuses on specific points of interest so that a field study is engaging and beneficial to pupils and teachers. ([www.trails.ie](http://www.trails.ie))

June is a good month in which to explore the school grounds or locality using a structured trail.

**Choosing to do a trail**

Much use is made by teachers of textbooks and the interactive whiteboard in the modern classroom. Nothing wrong with that, provided pupils also engage in outdoor activities.

Engaging in trails will enable pupils to:

- ✎ Take an interest and pride in their local environment.
- ✎ Appraise and respect that environment.
- ✎ Learn the skills associated with field work.
- ✎ Develop in themselves a sense of place.
- ✎ Utilise all the skills of the SESE curriculum.

**Compiling a trail**

A trail can be based on history, geography, science, maths, language or arts.

A typical environmental trail on the school grounds could consist of the following elements:

1. 6 stops or stations
2. Examples:  
 Stop 1 – The ash tree  
 Stop 2 – The school wall  
 Stop 3 – The log pile  
 Stop 4 – The hedgerow  
 Stop 5 – The grassy area  
 Stop 6 – The school gate
3. Compile a task-sheet for each stop and laminate it when it's completed.

**Elements of a task sheet**

Name of stop e.g. Stop 1 – The ash tree  
 Equipment needed e.g. Compass, crayons, string, ruler.

Points of information e.g. The ash tree has very flexible branches.

A low order question e.g. What colour are the buds?

A middle order question e.g. Is it deciduous or evergreen?

A high order question e.g. Why do you think the ash is useful for making hurleys?

An activity e.g. Do a bark rubbing.

Words of encouragement e.g. Well done! You have finished Stop 1.

Directions to next stop e.g. Face north. Proceed until you reach the school wall where the Stop 2 sign is.

Name of designer(s) e.g. Compiled by Ms Joan Hogan 4th class



*Pictured above, children completing their task sheets*

**Questions**

**Low order questions**

Simple observation  
 Recall  
 Factual response

Usually an element of choice

**High order questions**

An opinion  
 A deduction  
 An evaluation  
 A speculation  
 A hypothesis  
 May have many valid answers

**Middle order questions**

Thought and deduction with a correct response

This is a sample trail page created by Lorraine Hession, suitable for 2nd/3rd classes. It's obvious from this trail page that less is more. Points of information are kept to a minimum. The questions are varied and cater for the more able and the less able. Graphics which can be downloaded from [www.trails.ie](http://www.trails.ie) are used to enhance the page.

**An autumn trail, sample task sheet**



**The Rowan Tree**

**Equipment needed**

Pencil, paper, clipboard, crayons, notebook.

1. What colours are on the leaves at this time of year?
2. The fruits of this tree are:  
 a) acorns  b) berries  or c) nuts  ?
3. Why are there only a few berries on this tree?
4. Why do you think the berries are red?

**Activities**

In your notebook:  
 Do a sketch of the Rowan tree.  
 Do a leaf rubbing and a bark rubbing.

Well done!



Now move to Stop 5: The Cherry Tree in the corner in front of you.



**Points of information**

- ✎ The Rowan is a native Irish tree.
- ✎ It is a symbol of good luck.
- ✎ It is deciduous



**PADDY MADDEN** lectures on SESE in the Marino Institute of Education. He also gives short courses to whole staffs on school gardening. His book, **Go Wild at School**, has recently been reprinted.

Available for €15 plus €3 p&p from [paddy.madden@mie.ie](mailto:paddy.madden@mie.ie) His podcast on teaching about summer: Programme 141 – <http://www.insideed.com> Click Archives June 2012

### Organisation

Organisation is the key to success. *Divida et Impera* (Divide and Conquer) is a good motto to have when organising the class. It is both easy and fulfilling to teach children about the outdoors when they are divided into groups and focused on specific tasks.

- ✦ Preliminary work indoors on each stop.
- ✦ Divide class into 6 groups.
- ✦ Assign roles to each child e.g. Recorder, Equipment Manager, Encourager, Reporter, Timekeeper.
- ✦ Each group has notebook/copybook for recording answers and observations.
- ✦ Teacher has whistle to signal group movement.
- ✦ Place a container beside each stop with the equipment needed for the stop.
- ✦ Speak to whole group outside with wind at your back making sure the children aren't looking with sun in their eyes.
- ✦ A circular route is preferable to a linear one.

### Emphasise safety before going outside

1. No running.
2. Keep teacher in sight at all times.
3. Respond immediately to whistle.
4. Perhaps draw up a safety contract if leaving school grounds and get permission from parents and principal.
5. Wear luminous jackets if leaving school grounds.

### Aftermath

Reporter from each group recounts difficulties etc. Children are encouraged to do further research on each stop. The task-sheets are assembled in a folder with a cover stating: Name of trail; Class suitability; Season suitability; Equipment needed; Names of designers; Acknowledgements; Illustration.



*Compiled task sheets, bound with covers summarising the trail information. School children are from Twomilehouse NS, Co Kildare.*



### Resources

- ✦ [www.trails.ie](http://www.trails.ie)
- ✦ [www.rianta.ie](http://www.rianta.ie)
- ✦ [www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive/mata/MathsTrails/Mathstrails.pdf](http://www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive/mata/MathsTrails/Mathstrails.pdf)
- ✦ [www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive/intouch/Maths/Trailblazing.pdf](http://www.ppds.ie/pcsparchive/intouch/Maths/Trailblazing.pdf)
- ✦ [www.buildingsofireland.ie](http://www.buildingsofireland.ie) – very good website for designing a history trail in the local village or town or on a church or other prominent building in the locality.
- ✦ Primary Curriculum Support Programme (2001), *Guidelines for Devising Questions and Tasks in a Maths Trail*.
- ✦ Kagan S. (1994), *Cooperative Learning*

### Acknowledgements

Marian Rollins, RIP, for her pioneering work on trails and for inspiring many teachers to create their own class trails.  
Caroline Clune Farrell for her work, *Design a maths trail for use with 2nd class*.  
Séamus O Canainn, former director of Blackrock Education Centre for spear-heading the creation of the website [www.trails.ie](http://www.trails.ie)

### Strand Units covered this month

**Environmental Awareness and Care, Living Things, Natural Environments.**