



# Integrating



## an Explorer Mindset

**Grade Level: 4**

**Context: Elementary, Expanded Learning Program**

*Topic submitted by Stacey*

- The explorer mindset was integrated into an elementary gifted and talented (expanded learning) program by Stacey Snyder. About the program, Stacey explains, "My theme for my ELP program is Explore: Learning about yourself and your sense of place." Students consider what exploration means to them and they research a local area they would like to explore, ultimately creating a photo essay that shows their explorer mindset in action.
- As an elementary teacher Stacey thinks students are naturals at exploration. She states, "The kids really "get" the idea of exploring and how that opens up a new understanding of who they are. I also get them outdoors at least once a week for a learning experience. They begin to feel connected to our area which has wide open spaces, gardens and a small reconstructed prairie. They begin timid however they watch me model exploration and soon they are off! Exploration is such a natural part of how I was raised and how I teach! It is so easy to model it and get kids excited and connected to the natural world."

**Grade Level: 8**

**Context: Science**

*Topic submitted by Beth D*

- Beth integrated an explorer mindset in a series of social-emotional learning lessons as well as an ecology unit. Beth describes, "During the 2021-2022 school year, we had an extra block of time (35 minutes) each day, called Core Plus. This time was earmarked for both enrichment and remediation; the explorer mindset introduction fit perfectly into an SEL unit of study already set in motion. The implementation of the explorer mindset unit was during a time when many students were struggling with feelings of isolation and anxiety as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Encouraging them to open up and while teaching them to actively think like an explorer was a wonderful way to help them express their sometimes difficult feelings, all while connecting with others. They were able to better appreciate those who with similar and different experiences and perspectives than themselves.. I was able to take students outside for some of these lessons, and being in nature, even for a short time, was obviously impactful when enhanced by the explorer mindset."
- On the impact of an explorer mindset, Beth states "I believe integrating the explorer mindset was beneficial in many accounts. Working together as a class, shifting students' thinking after a couple of very difficult years worked wonders on both their social skills and emotional well-being. Being able to incorporate the explorer mindset during content lessons deepened their understanding of skills and concepts, encouraging students to better "think like scientists" when encountering new and unfamiliar subject matter."

# Integrating an Explorer Mindset

## Grade Level: 9

### Context: Biology, Characteristics and classification of living things

*Topic submitted by Beth Q*

- The explorer mindset was integrated into a 9th grade science classroom by Beth Quinones in a unit on cells and cell structure. Beth says, "This unit was a quick survey of different types of cells; prokaryote and eukaryote as well as different types of eukaryotes. Students used microscopes to explore unknown cells and try to identify cell types using structures (organelles, cell walls shapes etc)". Beth
- Beth and a co-teacher were teaching the exact same unit. Beth integrated an explorer mindset while her colleague did not, while having students take the same pre and post survey on empowerment and engagement. After seeing the results, they decided to both start integrating an explorer mindset into their classrooms. "We have continued to use the explorer mindset infographic at the start of every unit. We pose the question "What are you going to focus on for this unit?". We don't really follow up on the skills but do initiate our units with the reminder of the skills an explorer uses!"

## Grade Level: 12

### Context: AP Spanish

*Topic submitted by Abra*

- Abra Koch integrated an explorer mindset into one unit of a high school AP Spanish course. About the unit, she states "My AP Spanish students were tasked with exploring the cultural identity of a Spanish-speaking country using the qualities of explorers that we had studied in our lesson about the explorer mindset. Students had to choose three of the characteristics of explorers to be the focus of their investigation, and they had to explain how the explorer mindset guided their study of the target culture. They created lists of questions based on their chosen characteristics, dug deep into resources that helped them to answer those questions, and presented their work to their peers using the Explorer Mindset as the focus of their explanation."
- Reflecting on the impact it made, Abra states "I think that using the explorer mindset gave the students the confidence to be less traditional in their investigative methods. They had more freedom to identify types of information that might fit with the focus of their exploration, and they were allowed to present it in ways that made sense with their methods of inquiry. They had multiple pathways to success, and they were able to design and define that success." Because of that impact, Abra has continued integrating an explorer mindset in that unit. She states "We include a focus on the explorer mindset before embarking on any kind of investigation. I have added in case studies of Spanish-speaking National Geographic Explorers, and we use the characteristics of the Explorer Mindset to evaluate the type of inquiry done by each explorer. "

# Integrating an Explorer Mindset

**Grade Level: 6**

**Context: Science, Ecosystems Unit**

*Topic submitted by Dave*

- The explorer mindset was integrated by Dave Landers in a 6th grade science unit, which in his district is the first year that students have science on a daily basis. Dave explains, "We spend some time at the beginning of the year focusing on many of the nature-of-science type of things such as observation, asking questions, collecting data, the different "branches" of science and being curious. This leads into our ecosystem unit where students explore what could be causing a Lake Trout population in Lake Michigan to change."
- When reflecting on the impact of integrating exploration, Dave states "The explorer mindset helped to foster a sense of wonder in students and to challenge them to be curious ask questions and connected to the various aspects of the nature of science being used to better understand and explain our world. I think the very nature of the word "explore/explorer" has helped to generate enthusiasm of discovery and into the unknown. I appreciated being able to use the mindset for not only the unit of study but to continually refer back to throughout the year and identify at various points what attitudes, skills and knowledge were used on their various activities and work throughout the year. I really like the fact that while I used the mindset in science it can be applied to any content and the saying of 'How we learn is just as important as what we learn' is so applicable and valuable. I think students really benefit from the word 'mindset' in that it is a shift in thinking whether is is a "school" exploration or a interest/hobby/life exploration. In addition to the academic connections there were many connections made between the explorer mindset and our "life skills" and collaborative work in the classroom and in our school. I think the explorer mindset provided a wonderful integration of content and social emotional learning blurring the lines between them and demonstrating how they all work together and focusing on overall learning in taking action to be stewards of our blue planet."

