

TELECONFERENCING TIPS FROM EARTHWATCH TEACHERS

These tips excerpted from an EdNet Forum (www.ngsednet.org/earthwatch) are based on three teachers' experiences preparing their students to teleconference with Earthwatch teams in the field. Please note that one thing that isn't mentioned is the occasional "delay" time in using a satellite phone and the need for students to speak very clearly, and slowly over the phone, and provide enough time for the response.

[Suzanne](#)

[Smith](#)

On

01/24/2006

In regards to setting up the teleconference for your students, here is a list of some things that might be helpful:

1. Have the students be familiar with where you are going and what you are doing in the field so that they already have an idea of what to be asking about.
2. I had my students read the case study last year on Cuba and they had questions to go along with it. I have templates for all of this stuff including my Cuba prep worksheets.
3. Part of their assignment was to create 3 questions they had about the area/research. I had them write them down on a paper I had created and which also asked them if they would be interested in doing the call. From those who said yes, I created my list of teleconferencers. I told them beforehand that it is a little extra work for those chosen so that weeded out a few people :) I ran the conference last year with 22 kids in a room that wasn't so big. It really helped that I practiced with the kids several times before hand and then showed them the room. You need to make sure you tell them that they must be patient and quiet - technology isn't always the greatest thing!
4. Once the kids were chosen I made a list of their questions along with the names of those who asked them and tried to make a lineup of kids and questions in order. This was done so the kids were able to ask their own questions.
5. I then made copies and highlighted the questions the kids would ask so they could follow along - kind of like a script. It made it a lot easier for them and they began to know who they stood next to so there wasn't an issue when it came time to do it.

[Cynthia](#)

[Ripley](#)

On

01/24/2006

Hi ! I was a "non believer" when teleconferencing was first mentioned, but now can't even explain what a great experience it was! I worked on the EB3 project, too, when they were in Sri Lanka. My assumption was that all the email and higher tech would be most appealing to the kids. The email and background info provided through our web communication was invaluable, but the teleconferences brought it all to a more human level. I guess it's the power of the human voice!

I had the students prepare questions based on what they had learned. We decided as a class which questions could not be answered without "consulting" with people in the field. Once the questions were narrowed down I asked for volunteers - surprised that some were nervous about talking on the phone to someone they didn't know.

We then took the questions and distributed them to either the author or others who were interested. I printed all the questions out for all the participating students (50 each time), and had them highlight the question that they were going to ask.

I also printed them out on numbered cards to avoid any confusion about the order. One student was the "recorder" and videotaped it so we could review it together later. What a GREAT experience for ALL of us!! Best wishes!!

Jeff Wilford

On

01/24/2006

I agree with Cindy that teleconferencing engages the kids. Suzanne is also right, preteaching is very important but I am not quite sure how much. We want to be careful not to take away too much of the discovery of the experience.

Perhaps basic introductory material can be shared - just enough to begin to generate questions. I will have my sub do a couple of activities with them before hand just to get their minds thinking.

Each student will submit a question to the teacher and the teacher will go through and pick questions that will be asked. This will help weed out the 13 questions asking "what is the worst thing that's bitten you so far?" The kids will not be told if their question is one of those chosen (this may help keep their attention).

When we connect, each student will be responsible for bringing their question on the chance it is to be used. The teacher will always make sure there are two questioners ready to ask at all times in order to prevent gaps in questioning. I use my digital recorder to tape the conversations.

Also, the tech person in our school will put together a P/P presentation based on our uploaded materials and each student will have this running on their laptop during the connect. This can also be done with just one computer, a screen and an LCD. It makes it so much more engaging for the peripheral kids. Best of luck!

[Bonita
Coleman](#)
On
01/25/2006

When we did our teleconference last year (to Mongolia) we also had the students think of three questions, and we did approvals for the ones we wanted them to ask. Those that had been approved had been marked on their paper, and arranged by the teacher ahead of time.

Students had been given the order, so there was minimal time in between each one. They were instructed to queue quickly - as soon as one student moved forward to read their question, the next person was to get behind them in line. We did actually allow our students to ask the questions to the team - it made them own the project more fully.

We recorded the entire conversation on a small hand-held recorder (and video taped one of the sessions, too). The audio was extracted for later review by students, each question was separated, typed out and placed on the project website for anyone to read and listen to, whichever they liked.

Overall, the most important thing we learned was that stages work best. We started the intro about a week before and gave them incremental amounts of information to review. We made them responsible for a small portion of the info that they would share with the rest of the class, and the class had a worksheet on which they would collect information as they heard it.

Students were responsible for introducing the team and their work, while the teacher did an overview of the country and geographic area.

In the end it was a great success, most students said that was because they were the ones who were held accountable to learn and share about the upcoming interaction and the work the research team was doing - and we decided on those topics solely from the EW Briefing.