

Playa Impact Monster

This interactive skit introduces the Leave No Trace principles by teaching Impact Monster how to leave a lighter footprint on the playa.

Grade Level: all ages

Objectives:

- Students will be able to list at least four of the seven Leave No Trace principles and two ways to follow each of them.

Materials:

- Use your imagination to fashion these props. Hint - cardboard, scraps of fabric, markers and glue can go a long way!
- Impact Monster - backpack, bright clothes, handle bars, toilet paper, soap, garbage, thick marker, hatchet, camera, fire
- Audience costumes - frog w/ bubbles, tree, flowers, kit fox, sage brush, cryptobiotic soil
- Playa setting - blue tarp, fire ring, sticks, Mormon Dan Peak and Calico sign
- Narrator - Leave No Trace principle signs

Appendixes:

- Skit Outline: Page 5
- Cryptobiotic soil photo: Page 6

Time Considerations:

Preparations: 15 minutes*

Lesson Time: 25 - 35 minutes

Activity: 20-30 minutes

Conclusion: 5 minutes

*Prop creation is not included in prep time

Related Lesson Plans:

Trash Timeline, LNT Memory, Putting it into Context, Know Before You Go, Stop the Invasion!



Nevada Department of Education Standards

Health - Self Management

7.2.1 Identify responsible personal health behaviors.

7.5.1 Students demonstrate behaviors that avoid or reduce health risks.

Excellence in Environmental Education Guidelines

Strand 4 - Personal and Civic Responsibility

D) Learners understand that they have responsibility for the effects of their actions.

This lesson has been adapted from The Center's *Impact Monster Skit*:

Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. (2007). *Impact Monster Skit*. In *Leave No Trace 101: 101 Ways to Teach Leave No Trace* (pp. 28-30).

Background

Kid-friendly Leave No Trace principles:

Know Before You Go

- Learn about the area pre-trip
- Be prepared with a map, food, water and extra clothes

Choose the Right Path

- Stay on the trail, even through mud
- Avoid stepping on flowers or small trees
- Sit on large rocks instead of grassy meadows

Trash Your Trash

- Don't leave any trash or litter
- If you have to "go", do it away from water (100 big steps)
- If your dog is with you, pick up their poop

Leave What You Find

- Treat plants with respect
- Don't bring home anything

you find

- Leave things as you find them

Be Careful with Fire

- Use stoves for cooking
- Use only loose sticks from the ground
- Don't burn trash or food
- Check with rangers to see if its OK to have a fire

Respect Wildlife

- Control your pet
- Store food and trash in a safe spot
- Never feed, follow or chase wild animals
- If an animal changes its behavior you're too close

Be Kind to Other Visitors

- Share trails with other hikers, bikers, etc
- Step aside to let people on horses pass
- Don't yell or make loud noises

Preparation

Two adults are needed for this skit - one to be the narrator (who leads the group discussion) and Impact Monster.

Note that Impact Monster supposedly can't see the narrator, it's just a voice, kind of like...oh say, her conscious.

Set up the playa setting before audience arrives.

Choose kids from the audience to play: frog, sage brush, tree, flowers, kit fox, signs, cryptobiotic soil. Give them a brief description of what they are going to be doing in the skit.

Doing the Activity

Impact Monster Skit:

Narrator: Hello, my name is ___ from Nevada Outdoor School. I want to start today by asking a question. By show of hands, how many of you have heard of Leave No Trace? (hopefully some people raise their hands) That's great!

OK, I have another question; can anyone tell me what an impact is? (when you change something, could be a positive or a negative change) Well when it comes to nature and the playa we want to have as small of a negative impact as possible. And that's why we follow the Leave No Trace principles.

Today Impact Monster is going on a backpacking trip and we're going to help her learn about the Leave No Trace principles.

When Impact Monster does something that doesn't follow the principles I'm going to hold up a sign that says the principle that needs to be followed and you're going to say it with me. Let's practice! *[hold up a couple of the signs to practice]* Awesome! Now remember, when I hold up the signs you're going to say it with me.

OK, now close your eyes and let me paint you a picture... We're going to go on a backpacking trip in the Calico Mountains and stop to see Coyote Spring first. It's a beautiful fall day with blue skies, a cool breeze and breathtaking views of the Black Rock Desert Playa. You can feel the breeze on your face and smell the scent of sage – enjoy the experience.

Impact Monster: *[rides up to Coyote Dunes, do some donuts and make engine noise]* Oooohhh what a b-e-a-utiful day! I hope I get to see a kit fox!

Narrator: *[holds up sign]* Choose the Right Path! Impact Monster, Coyote Dunes is a sensitive habitat that is being damaged by people riding in off-limits areas. You're riding in precious kit fox habitat.

Impact Monster: *[looks around wondering where the voice is coming from, rides back to the edge of the dunes]* Hmm fine then...

Narrator: It's the Impact Monster's lucky day, a kit fox wanders into view.

Impact Monster: Whoah! Look

there's a kit fox over there!! *[gets her camera]* KIT FOX! HEY KIT FOX!!! LOOK OVER HERE! SAY CHEESE KIT FOX! I WANT TO TAKE YOUR PICTURE!!

Narrator: Due to all of the noise Impact Monster made, the kit fox ran away to find somewhere quiet to rest. *[holds up sign]* Respect Wildlife! Impact Monster disturbed the kit fox that was just trying to make its way to the spring. She should learn to be respectful toward wild animals, since she is a guest in their home, next time she could use binoculars to get a better look.



Impact Monster: *[mumbles something about who keeps saying that stuff]* Dang I really wanted a close up picture of that kit fox, but I only got a picture of its tail running away. I suppose I'll be on my way to the trailhead.

Narrator: Impact Monster makes her way over to a trailhead leading into the Calico Mountains Wilderness.

Impact Monster: I can't wait to get on the trail! Now if only I

could find that map...[search pack and pockets]...oh well. I'm sure the trail is well marked – we'll call it an adventure.

Narrator: [holds up sign] Know Before You Go! Impact Monster is not prepared for her backpacking trip. Without a map she could get lost.

Impact Monster: Pff I'll be fine voice, don't you worry about me.

[walks a little way and encounters switchbacks] Uuuugggghhhh I don't want to hike all that extra way on switchbacks, I'm just going to make my own path straight up this hill and save some time. [cuts through the crowd instead of going around the rows of people]

Narrator: [holds up sign] Choose the Right Path! Impact Monster didn't stay on the trail. Ignoring switchbacks can cause erosions or new-unwanted paths.

Impact Monster: [looks around wondering where the voice is coming from, shrugs and keeps walking. Sees sign for Mormon Dan Peak] Oh! Mormon Dan Peak, I bet that's a pretty view. I want people to know I've been here! [gets out pen and writes IM on sign] I. M. There! Now people will know Impact Monster was here!

Narrator: [holds up sign] Be Kind to Other Visitors! Impact Monster vandalizing property causes extra work for government employees and other visitors don't like seeing it.

Impact Monster: [looks around, shrugs and walks up to Mormon Dan Peak and steps on some cryptobiotic soil.] [cryptobiotic soil squeals.]

Narrator: Watch where you step Impact Monster! [holds up sign] Choose the Right Path! You're crushing communities of tiny living organisms that can take up to 250 years to rebuild. This soil is important in the desert because it helps retain water and prevent erosion.

Impact Monster: Whoah sorry voice don't get so upset...Oh well, better be on my way so I can find somewhere to camp. [hikes over to hot spring] Welp, this looks like a great place to camp! Nice and close to a hot spring, gorgeous views, yep! Perfect!

Narrator: [holds up sign] Choose the Right Path! Impact Monster should camp at least 200 feet from water to help protect these natural resources. This is especially important in the desert since water is such a scarce and precious resource.

Impact Monster: [mumbles pff I'll camp where I want...starts to unpack and trash goes everywhere] Where is that dang thing?? [dumps out backpack on the ground – more trash!]

Narrator: [holds up sign] Trash Your Trash! Impact Monster is making a mess and littering; that's not good for wildlife, plus no one wants to walk miles into wilderness and see a pile of trash.

Impact Monster: [grumbles fine...I'll pick it up later...gets a wiff of armpit] Whoah! I'm not smelling too good after that hike! I might meet Mr. Right out here, I can't be stinky! [grabs soap and jumps in the hot spring]

Narrator: The wildlife that use this hot spring as a water source aren't going to appreciate that. Look, the frog is blowing bubbles from the soapy water. [holds up sign] Trash Your Trash! Impact Monster wasn't thinking about the poor frog or protecting the water when she decided to use soap in the water. She should have collected some water and carried it 200 feet away from the hot spring.



Impact Monster: I'm taking a bath! Can I have no privacy?! Fine! I'll get out...[gets out of hot spring and goes back to camp] Op! Do you hear that? Nature is calling. [grabs tp and goes behind a sage brush, comes back out with tp going here and there and some stuck to her shoe]

Narrator: [holds up sign] Trash Your Trash! Oh Impact Monster...I don't think you dug a cat hole for your waste and

you're supposed to carry out your trash – that includes tp. I *know* other visitors don't want to see that!

Impact Monster: My tp! I'm supposed to carry out my tp?!

Narrator: It's not a big deal, just take a plastic baggy with you and zip lock your tp safely in there.

Impact Monster: Voice you are so demanding...

Oh! Flowers! My day just got better! *[picks flower]*

Narrator: *[holds up sign]* Leave What You Find! Now Impact Monster...wildlife use those wildflowers and other visitors won't be able to enjoy them. Why don't you take a picture of them instead?

Impact Monster: Opps...ugh sorry flowers. *[put flower back on ground pretending she didn't pick it and takes a picture]*

Burr! It's getting cold, did I bring my jacket? *[searches through stuff]* Uh ohhh it's going to be a cold night.

Narrator: *[holds up sign]* Know Before You Go! Impact Monster didn't plan ahead, even though it was a nice day when she hit the trail it gets cold at night, plus weather can be unpredictable.

Impact Monster: Yeah, yeah... well I'll show you voice! I can still build a fire to keep me warm. *[takes out hatchet and goes over to standing tree and starts chopping off a branch]*

Narrator: *[holds up sign]* Be Careful With Fire! Impact Monster you're only supposed to use loose sticks from the ground for fires, remember – we're protecting the resources.

Impact Monster: *[stops chopping]* Opps...ugh sorry. *[pats tree and starts picking up sticks from the ground and starts fire]*

Narrator: A kit fox walks down to get a drink from the water.

Impact Monster: *[whispers]* Oh! Another kit fox! I'm going to be quiet this time and get a good picture! *[goes and sits by the sage brush]*

Narrator: The kit fox gets a drink and then scampers back into the forest. Impact Monster gets up and goes back to her fire. *[holds up sign]* Be Careful With Fire! Impact Monster, you did really well respecting wildlife, but you left your fire unattended. One little spark and all of this could be gone.

Impact Monster: *[the importance of LNT has just hit you]* All gone...I don't want this to be gone, it's beautiful here... Thank you for teaching me about Leave No Trace, I didn't realize how big of a footprint I was leaving and how big of an impact I was making. Voice can you go over those Leave No Trace principles with me one more time so I'll remember for next time. *[sit with audience and invite helpers to sit too]*

Conclusion

Narrator: Alright, but you all have to help me...I'm going to hold up each principle and then you all can help me by raising your hands and naming ways we can follow that principle...

Thank you all for helping Impact Monster learn about Leave No Trace principles.

Assessment

Informally evaluate participants' knowledge by noting how many people raise their hands to answer the questions during the conclusion and if you get correct answers.

Extension

Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* is a great outdoor ethics story that engages youth and as an added bonus calms a rowdy group down.

Impact Monster Skit Outline

Narrator - intro, audience participation, paint scene

Impact Monster - enter on ATV riding in off-limits, looking for kit fox

Narrator - Choose the Right Path!

Impact Monster - yells at kit fox

Narrator - Respect Wildlife!

Impact Monster - goes to trailhead, no map

Narrator - Know Before You Go!

Impact Monster - cuts switchbacks

Narrator - Choose the Right Path!

Impact Monster - Mormon Dan Peak sign vandalism

Narrator - Be Kind to Other Visitors!

Impact Monster - Steps on crypto

Narrator - Choose the Right Path!

Impact Monster - goes to camp

by hot spring

Narrator - Choose the Right Path!

Impact Monster - unpacks trash

Narrator - Trash Your Trash!

Impact Monster - jumps in hot spring for bath

Narrator - Trash Your Trash!

Impact Monster - nature calling

Narrator - Trash Your Trash! yep, even your tp

Impact Monster - flowers

Narrator - Leave What You Find!

Impact Monster - brr it's cold!

Narrator - Know Before You Go!

Impact Monster - cut down tree for fire

Narrator - Be Careful With Fire!

Impact Monster - picks up sticks for small fire

Narrator - fox gets drink from lake

Impact Monster - goes to sit by tree and respectful to fox

Vocabulary

Cat hole: The most widely-accepted method of waste disposal in the backcountry. A six to eight inch deep and four to six inch in diameter hole that is 200 feet away from water used to bury human waste.

Cryptobiotic soil: This crust consisting of tiny communities of living organisms is found in desert environments and is extremely vulnerable to foot traffic. It can take more than 250 years for this living soil to fully recover. In a nutshell - living soil that can be destroyed by one footstep.

Erosion: the movement of sediment from one place to another, usually from a mountain to a valley

Narrator - you did well with the fox, but fire unattended, Be Careful With Fire!

Impact Monster - I don't want this to be gone...tell me more about LNT

Narrator - goes over LNT principles with audience help

Sources

- Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. (2007). Impact Monster Skit. In *Leave No Trace 101: 101 Ways to Teach Leave No Trace* (pp. 28-30).

Images:

- Panoramio. *Cryptobiotic soil on the esplanade*. Retrieved March 10, 2010, from <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/23570479>



Cryptobiotic Soil
Living soil that
can be destroyed
by one footprint