



Discovering Alabama

Teacher's Guide

Alabama Model School

Suggested Curriculum Areas
Across the Curriculum

Suggested Grade Levels
All Grade Levels

Key Concepts
Relevant Learning
Meaningful Learning
Exciting Learning

Key Skills
Connecting Content
Reaching Every Child
Involving the Community

Synopsis

This video highlights an innovative curriculum approach designed in cooperation with Alabama teachers seeking to combine nature study, the *Discovering Alabama* documentary series, and other selected resources to address multiple areas of educational need. The video features the staff, students, and parents of Woodland Forrest Elementary School where the learning program was developed (Woodland Forrest is the name of the school's surrounding subdivision community). Teachers at Woodland Forrest Elementary have participated in numerous *Discovering Alabama* workshops over the years, gaining skills in hands-on outdoor education and the use of a variety of instructional materials including *Discovering Our Heritage*, Project WILD, Project Learning Tree, and the *Discovering Alabama* documentaries and Teacher Guides. And in 2009, these teachers determined that "Discovering Alabama" is the ideal theme around which to organize many of their favorite instructional resources. Thus they decided to design a "Discovering Alabama curriculum plan" for the entire school year and to establish Woodland Forrest Elementary as a "Discovering Alabama Model School." Their model program integrates content across subject areas in ways that make learning locally relevant and meaningful for students while also actively engaging parents, the community, and a collaborative of supportive organizations and expertise. **Many teachers believe the "Discovering Alabama Model School" concept represents a timely approach for overall improvement of K-12 education in Alabama.**

Woodland Forrest Elementary School now wants to share their successful program concept with other schools. The "Alabama Model School" video and Teacher's Guide are intended especially for use by Alabama teachers and administrators interested in implementing a similar program.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA



Discovering Alabama is a production of the Alabama Museum of Natural History in cooperation with Alabama Public Television. For a complete list of titles in the *Discovering Alabama* series, as well as for information about ordering videos and accompanying Teacher's Guides, contact us at either: *Discovering Alabama*, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0340; phone: (205) 348-2039; fax: (205) 348-4219; or email: orders@discoveringalabama.org. Also visit our website: www.discoveringalabama.org.

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*The Solon and Martha
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Alabama Department Of
Conservation and Natural Resources
State Lands Division

Before Viewing

1. Visit the *Discovering Alabama* website (www.discoveringalabama.org) to learn about *Discovering Alabama's* long-time role assisting K–12. Review *Discovering Alabama's* many programs and resources available for supporting Alabama schools. Be sure to note *Discovering Alabama's* “Ask the Expert” and “Virtual Field Trips.”
2. Invite interested teachers to view two previous *Discovering Alabama* videos, “Discovering Our Heritage” and “Project Community 2010,” which highlight earlier *Discovering Alabama* K–12 projects that helped inspire Woodland Forrest teachers to develop the “Discovering Alabama Model School” concept.
2. Arrange a meeting of your teacher group, your school principal, and others you wish to invite, and consider ways of using the *Discovering Alabama* series and the “Discovering Alabama Model School” concept at your school.
3. Contact *Discovering Alabama* (info@discoveringalabama.org) and schedule an in-service session to further explore possibilities for *Discovering Alabama* support of your school.

While Viewing

Watch for activities in which students are actively *discovering*. Watch for activities that connect content to learning experiences directly relevant to the local community and **Alabama**.

Video Mystery Questions:

1. Which educational resource combines the important dimensions of a) learning through active discovery and b) learning that is locally relevant? (**Answer:** *Discovering Alabama*).
2. Does the “Discovering Alabama Model School Program” have the support of anyone outside the school? (**Answer:** Yes, very much so. The video reveals that the program enjoys collaborative support from many key sources—parents, school-board members, system superintendent, local University, and a host of organizations and agencies, including the Alabama State Department of Education.)

After Viewing

1. Convene a group of fellow teachers and discuss whether the “Discovering Alabama Model School” concept is a suitable possibility for your school. (See the back panel of this Teacher’s Guide to review key considerations for developing/implementing a similar Model School program.)

Extensions

View *Discovering Alabama* videos that relate to various topics of your choice and review the Teacher’s Guides for the shows you select. Incorporate these, together with other favorite resources, to develop a sample lesson plan or unit targeting academic objectives for a variety of subjects. To support objectives for reading and comprehension, include three novels for young adults—*Longleaf* (2006), *Space* (2008), and *Time* (2011)—authored by *Discovering Alabama* writer and director, Roger Reid (and published by Junebug Books, Montgomery/Louisville). These books dovetail with several *Discovering Alabama* programs and offer adventurous mystery stories that take place in authentic Alabama settings linked with plenty of content related to the natural sciences and other subjects.

Philosophical Reflections

These days it seems everyone is “for education.” But education for what purpose? Should the focus be on education for the “whole person,” or education for the job market? Personal growth or competitive advantage? Should the priority be intellectual development or technical training? Should we be teaching for meaning, or for test scores?

Different interest groups have differing views about the purposes of education and the role of K–12 schooling. Unfortunately, this often fuels conflicting political pressures on U.S. education at every level—national, state, and local. Thus schools are subject to the shifting priorities and mandates of changing government administrations, revolving school boards, and other fluctuating forces.

So, looking to the future, how do we attain the best educational outcomes for our schools and our children? Perhaps an answer to this question is also an answer to the question, “What should be the purpose of education?” As the world continues to change at an accelerating pace, the future of our planet will require new levels of global cooperation and insightful leadership. As many of today’s problems and issues become increasingly complex, the future of our great nation demands an enlightened public engaging actively to ensure enlightened policies and programs. Therefore, our schools must meet the challenge to produce a broadly educated populace. Academically proficient, of course. Equipped for productive careers, certainly. But also prepared in several additional areas of crucial concern. Our schools must work to cultivate a citizenry with able capacity for scientific interest and inquiry, for thoughtful assessment and critical analysis, for cultural sensitivity and appreciation, for compassionate understanding and civil discourse, and for effective problem-solving grounded in ethical regard for human welfare and the welfare of our planet. If these vital needs are among our educational priorities, then our schools are indeed serving a grand purpose. Otherwise, we may well be inviting our nation and our planet soon to be in serious decline—hardly a desirable objective of good curriculum planning.

Nature in Art

Review the many “Nature in Art” sections available in the series of *Discovering Alabama Teacher’s Guides*. From these, select suitable activities and ideas for your sample lesson plan/unit.

Community Connections

Arrange a special project or field trip for parents that involves active investigation and “discovery” of a local environmental feature such as a forest, farm, stream, watershed, etc. Discuss with parents how such an activity might be organized and conducted to serve the school curriculum. Discuss how parents might participate.

Additional References

Discovering Alabama—Living Laboratory for Learning: A Guidebook for Designing the Discovering Alabama Model School Program (2012). A program of Woodland Forrest Elementary School in partnership with *Discovering Alabama*. Available from *Discovering Alabama*.

Discovering Our Heritage—A Community Collaborative Approach: Model Social Studies Program Incorporating Environmental Education to Integrate the Teaching of History, Geography, Science, Mathematics, and Language Arts, Grades K–6 and 10–11 (2001–2006). A program of the Alabama Wildlife Federation in partnership with *Discovering Alabama*. Available from *Discovering Alabama*.

The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion by William Glasser, M.D. (New York: Perennial Library, 1990).

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder by Richard Louv (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2006).

The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth by E.O. Wilson (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

For overviews of the history, diversity, and economic and ecological importance of Alabama wetlands and forests, and the many values of the state’s abundant rural lands, read the following books with texts by Doug Phillips and photography by Robert Falls:

Discovering Alabama Wetlands (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

Discovering Alabama Forests (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006).

Discovering Alabama Countryside (in publication).

Parting Thoughts

A major role of *Discovering Alabama* is helping Alabama schools provide effective solutions to educational needs. Of course, any attempt at devising an effective solution requires an understanding of the problem at hand. And with respect to K–12 needs, this is not always a simple matter. Just as there are conflicting views about the purposes of K–12 schooling, there are also different opinions about “the problem” with U.S. schools today.

For example, people on the street might proclaim “there’s no discipline anymore,” “it’s all that politically correct stuff,” “it’s the government,” and “they’ve taken prayer out of the schools.” Ask an educational bureaucrat, on the other hand, and you might hear something like “we need more funding,” “our priority is on improving test scores,” “we must implement ongoing assessment of performance-based program effectiveness and accountability,” and “we need more funding.” Other interest groups hold still different opinions. For example, business executives often describe the problem in terms such as “schools are not preparing students for today’s job market,” “they’re failing to ensure U.S. economic competitiveness,” “other countries are ahead in math and science,” and “we need more charter schools, going forward.”

Meanwhile, teachers experience schooling from an insider’s perspective, and they will tell you “there’s too much bureaucracy and paperwork,” “not enough time to really teach,” “too much emphasis on testing,” and “teachers are not invited to the table for program and policy decisions.” But to me, many of the most troubling concerns affecting

K–12 today are the difficulties that teachers increasingly identify as coming from outside the school. These include “the bad influence on children from so much mindless media—from pop music, television, video games, and disturbing Internet material,” “confused values in our society,” “weakened and disintegrating families,” “many parents today don’t care,” “society today is so materialistic—kids are too fixated on brand name and image,” “kids are often struggling to find real meaning in their lives,” and “more students come to school with emotional and adjustment problems.”

Thus teachers today find themselves caught in a difficult crossfire. They must nurture an upcoming generation affected by many new “issues” of our times, while they must also deal with ever-changing policies, programs, and mandates that stem from the many conflicting political pressures on education. In other words, “the problem” with our schools is complex. And teachers sometimes grow weary from it all. Sometimes they experience “burn out.” But never do they forgo their love, commitment, and hope for our children.

So let me say emphatically, *Discovering Alabama* is here for you, the teacher. We recognize that there are complex factors affecting communities, schools, and children today. Our programs and materials are developed with this understanding and offered for your use to help address a range of educational needs. We invite you to visit us at www.discoveringalabama.org.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Another “Additional Reference” is a publication entitled “Teacher’s Role Concepts and the Qualities of Teacher-Student Relationships,” authored by one Dr. Doug Phillips. Oh, I’m kidding, don’t read that. It’s my doctoral dissertation—pretty tedious stuff. But at least now you know that my graduate field was in education, and my doctoral work was with teachers. This has allowed me a career with the special honor of assisting Alabama schools and working with Alabama teachers in the development of numerous programs supportive of K–12 education. The “*Discovering Alabama Model School*” program combines the best aspects of many of these earlier initiatives.

Happy outings,

Dr. Doug





Discovering Alabama

Activity/Information Sheet

Alabama Model School

Background

The “Synopsis” on the first page of this Teacher’s Guide provides brief background for the decision by Woodland Forrest Elementary School to develop the “Discovering Alabama Model School Program” that takes its name from the *Discovering Alabama* television series. But *Discovering Alabama* is more than simply a name and a title. And while TV broadcasts of *Discovering Alabama* attract a diverse audience of outdoor enthusiasts, the series is more than merely an “outdoor show.”

***Discovering Alabama* is an educational concept drawing upon Alabama’s rich natural heritage as a springboard for learning that is interdisciplinary, connecting science and social studies, nature and the arts, ecology and economics, and the past with the present and the future.**

The series promotes learning that is locally relevant, inquiry-based, hands-on, and, where possible, project-based and community oriented. Also, *Discovering Alabama* invites all Alabamians—children and adults—to embrace the natural wonders of the state and protect this special heritage.

Alabama is one of the most naturally diverse regions on Earth. This unique natural abundance provides an exceptional “living laboratory” for learning. Therefore, *Discovering Alabama* has long served Alabama schools as a suitable theme around which to organize instructional resources and develop learning programs. In the case of Woodland Forrest Elementary School, the school principal and teaching staff elected to implement such a learning approach across the curriculum for the entire school year. Of course, their model program is shaped to fit their particular school situation, community, and locational setting. Specific information regarding components of their curriculum plan can be obtained by

contacting *Discovering Alabama* (phone: 205–348–2039 or email: info@discoveringalabama.org). Also available from *Discovering Alabama* is the helpful handbook, *Discovering Alabama—Living Laboratory for Learning: A Guidebook for Designing the Discovering Alabama Model School Program*. Meanwhile, educators interested in developing a similar *Discovering Alabama* school program might begin as outlined below.

Program Development/Implementation

The “Discovering Alabama Model School Program” was developed during a twelve-month period through a sequential process as follows:

1. Form a Teacher Team to a) collaborate with *Discovering Alabama* staff and assess curriculum possibilities for developing a *Discovering Alabama* model program, b) identify preferred instructional components, materials, and resources, and c) develop an initial program plan/framework.
2. Establish a “Community Collaborative” to ensure community understanding and support for the program and to gain active participation by parents and various sources of assistance and expertise.
3. Refine the initial program plan/framework, and acquisition of needed instructional materials, resources, and equipment.
4. Provide teacher training as needed with assistance from *Discovering Alabama* and other selected sources.
5. Implement pilot of the program plan with further refinement and/or revision of the plan as needed.
6. Implement final program together with appropriate publicity, celebration, recognition, etc.

Primary Resources

Many quality resources are available for schools interested in developing a “Discovering Alabama Model School Program.” Among the primary resources incorporated at Woodland Forrest Elementary School were the following:

- * complete set of *Discovering Alabama* DVDs, Teacher’s Guides, books, and materials.
- * special room serving as the “Discovering Alabama Movie Theater,” equipped with large screen and high-quality DVD projector and audio system.
- * special outdoor area on school grounds, improved and prepared as an “outdoor classroom” (developed and certified according to guidelines of Alabama’s Outdoor Classroom Program).
- * computer access to *Discovering Alabama* web resources such as the *Discovering Alabama* “Virtual Field Trips” and “Ask the Expert.”
- * special resource room serving as a “Discovery Lab,” equipped with such resources as nature field guides and reference sources, compasses, maps, soil and water sampling kits, microscopes, hand lenses, binoculars,

critters (as may be humanely kept for periodic observation, e.g., fish aquarium, worm box, turtle den, insect terrarium), and many other items supportive of field trips, outdoor classroom activities, and other hands-on projects.

- * “Community Collaborative” comprising organizations and individuals providing ongoing involvement and willing to offer special expertise or assistance to support the program.

Additional Considerations

1. Every school situation is different, but the “Discovering Alabama Model School Program” is flexible and adaptable to suit most schools; it can be designed in any number of ways to fit your situation.
2. Even if you are already using other environmental resources or activity guides (Project WILD, Legacy, GLOBE, Project Learning Tree), the “Discovering Alabama Model School Program” can easily incorporate such materials and is helpful in strengthening the connection of these materials to state standards and requirements. In fact, *Discovering Alabama* served a lead role in establishing many of these educational resources for Alabama, and we continue to support the effective use of these resources in Alabama schools.
3. As is the case at Woodland Forrest Elementary School, the “Discovering Alabama Model School Program” tends to generate great interest from parents and a host of agencies and organizations. The positive identity of the *Discovering Alabama* TV series can be a favorable asset when seeking school grants and other kinds of support.
4. *Discovering Alabama* DVDs/videos are typically used for indoor viewing, but a major aim of the series is to inspire Alabamians to get outdoors and experience the state’s natural areas. Likewise, outdoor-learning opportunities should be an important part of your curriculum planning.
5. Visit the *Discovering Alabama* website (www.discoveringalabama.org) and check out “Teacher Tips for Using *Discovering Alabama*” for suggestions about how to optimize the effectiveness of *Discovering Alabama* DVDs/videos.

To reiterate, the “Discovering Alabama Model School Program” was developed by teachers who had participated in several *Discovering Alabama* Teacher Workshops and who were familiar with the *Discovering Alabama* video series, Teacher’s Guides, and related curriculum materials. Such prior familiarity is not necessary for other schools interested in the model program. However, you will find it helpful to involve *Discovering Alabama* very early in your planning so as to ensure consideration of all options for school assistance.