

Moving Water Safety and Survival

With Oscar Otter

Teacher Lesson Plan

Elementary Grade Level Two

Sponsored by Rescue 3 International

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About the Author

The author worked as a fire fighter, rescue specialist, and rescue instructor. He taught flood and river rescue extensively through Rescue 3 International, both in the United States and abroad. Having been on many rescues and recoveries during his career, he felt a strong need to educate people about the dangers associated with moving water. He envisioned a program to begin educating children at an early age, with knowledge they could grow with, and that would ultimately have an impact on the number of water related fatalities in years to come. In 2008, he was forced to retire from firefighting and rescue instruction due to a debilitating disability. That same year he was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award for contributions to Rescue 3 and the rescue industry. However, even after retirement, he never lost sight of that vision to develop this program, and this work is the culmination of that goal.

About the Artist

Lena Podesta works as an illustrator and animator in beautiful, soggy Portland, Oregon. She loves drawing, a good story, and swimming (safely, of course). Find out more about Lena at www.lenapodesta.com or follow her on twitter @lenapodesta.

About Rescue 3 International

Rescue 3 International is the world's leader in technical rescue curriculum development and accreditation with over 1500 certified instructors in 52 countries around the world. Over the past 35 years, Rescue 3 Instructors have trained over 250,000 students, many of whom are Professional Rescuers, River and Mountain Guides, and Military Personnel.

For more information on Rescue 3, visit www.rescue3.com.

Important Message From The Author

Water related fatalities are the second leading cause of accidental death for children under the age of sixteen, preceded only by automobile accidents. Approximately sixty percent of these occur in rural lakes, streams and rivers. The purpose of this program is to educate our children, and the general public, about some of the dangers associated with these environments. Enclosed are eight lessons that have been developed to help our children increase their margin of safety and survival. The goal of this program is to ultimately reduce the number of water related fatalities through continued education.

Rivers and lakes are a great way to cool off and to enjoy a variety of activities. But each has its own inherent risks. Rivers have cold water, swift currents, and potential entrapments from rocks, boulders, low level dams, fallen trees and other snags. Lakes have cold deep water, distant shorelines, and the danger of boating accidents. While reviewing these lessons some reference may be necessary about these hazards. Use caution when discussing these with the children. Keep in mind that the objective is instill safe practices around the water and not to frighten them about these environments.

Program Implementation

The teacher should review these lessons and insure their own understanding of its content before presenting to the students. Realizing that time is a critical element each day in the classroom, these lesson have been created to be “to-the-point”, while targeting key life-long and life-saving knowledge. Approximately fifteen minutes a day is estimated to cover two lessons. It is recommended that this program be implemented over a four-day period. Two lessons should be addressed per day, while reviewing the previous days’ lessons. Coloring books should be kept in the classroom and used as a reference each day by the students. The teacher is encouraged to write key points and/or children’s responses on the board during the discussions to aid in learning. When all eight lessons have been covered, the books should then go home to be completed as a homework assignment. They should involve the family (parents, guardians, siblings) with its completion, such as coloring the book while teaching them the lessons. As another option, the teacher may have the students color the illustrations each day, but still take it home as an assignment to review with the family members. Family members could initial each page in recognition that the lessons were reviewed. Either way, this will help reach the general public with this knowledge, while leaving the children with a sense of empowerment.

Materials

- Lesson Plan
- Coloring Books
- Oscar Poster
- White or Black Board Desirable

Introduction

Class Discussion

Engage the children in conversation by asking them what type of activities they like to enjoy on the waterways.

Possible Responses: swimming, boating, fishing, water sports, etc.

Explain that they can safely enjoy their activities by following some simple rules and that Oscar Otter is going to help us do that.

Pass out the coloring books and introduce Oscar.

Have them write their name on the front cover in the space provided.

Explain that Oscar will be teaching some safe practices this week. Let them know the importance of learning these lessons, as they will be responsible for sharing the information with their family as a homework assignment. Much of what they will be learning their parents may not even know. So you will get to go home and be the teacher, and teach them some life-saving knowledge.

Close

Teacher states:

Oscar says. ***You Otter do great if you follow the eight.***

Lesson 1

Teacher Information

Children need to obtain permission from a parent or guardian before engaging in any activities near the water. They also need to let them know specifically what they will be doing. If they choose to alter their activity, they should discuss it again with the responsible adult.

Key Words For The Board

Parental Permission

Class Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson1.

Reference the illustration and how Oscar is asking for permission to go down to the water.

Explain how they need to talk a parent or guardian, and ask for their permission, before going near any body of water. They also need to let them know specifically what they will be doing, and to talk to them again if they change their activity.

Class Questions:

If you have permission to go swimming and a friend wants to paddle out on the lake in a boat, would it be okay to go or should you get permission again?

If you have permission to go fishing and you decide you want to jump in and cool off, would it be okay to go in or should you get permission to do so?

Responses should be “to get permission”.

Close

Ask the children. What does Oscar say?

Children’s response: *Let someone know before you go.*

Lesson 2

Teacher Information

Children should have a responsible adult accompany them when they indulge in any activity near the water. This would, preferably, be a parent, guardian or other adult approved by the parent or guardian. If they get hurt or get into trouble, someone would be there to help and/or go for help.

Class Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson 2 and look at the illustration.

Explain that the circle next to Oscar is for a grown-up to go with him. Let the children know that they should never go alone near the water, and that they should always have a grown-up with them.

Class Questions:

Why do you think you should have a grown-up with you?

Possible responses; trouble swimming, get lost, hurt, scared, strangers

Who do you think would be a responsible adult to go?

Possible responses: (write on the board); parent, older sibling, aunt, uncle, teacher, scout leader, policeman, etc.

Emphasize that going with another grown-up might be okay if you have your parents permission to do so.

Have them draw a grown-up in the circle, in class or as part of the homework assignment.

Close

Ask the children. What does Oscar say?

Children's response: *Don't go alone when you leave your home.*

Lesson 3

Teacher Information

PFD is a personal flotation device, commonly referred to as a life jacket. This is the single most important tool to insure a child's safety in these environments. Most drowning incidents could have been prevented with the use of a PFD. Inflatable float rings, air mattresses, arm rings, pool toys, etc. are not acceptable as a personal flotation device. A PFD should be US Coast Guard approved, Type III, and preferably with leg straps like Oscars.

Key Words For The Board

PFD, Personal Flotation Device

U S Coast Guard Approved

Class Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson 3, and circle the item they think Oscar should take with him on the water.

Tell them that roller skates won't work well on water and a pet elephant would sure be fun, but it probably wouldn't fit too well in the boat. Ask how many circled the lifejacket?

Explain that a lifejacket is a PFD, Personal Flotation Device (refer to the board). Tell them that they should wear one anytime they're involved in any activity near or on the water. Rivers have swift currents and many hazards, which we will discuss in further lessons. If you are swept away your PFD is the one thing that will keep you from getting into serious trouble. If you're out on a lake and you end up in the water because your boat overturned or you got hurt, your PFD is going to keep you floating. So, wear a PFD.

Point out that the PFD should be US Coast Guard approved. (refer to the board)

Ask them if they know what the Coast Guard is? Based on their response, explain that they are a government agency like the Army or Navy, and that they protect our waterways and makes them safe for us to use. They also determine what kind of PFD's are the safest.

Make sure they understand that inflatable pool toys, float rings, air mattresses and arm rings are not acceptable as a PFD, and they're not Coast Guard approved as lifesaving devices.

Close

Ask the Children. What does Oscar say?

Children's response: ***You otter be in a good PFD.***

Lesson 4

Teacher Information

Many drowning incidents result in multiple victims. Friends, family members and bystanders have all become victims jumping in the water to save someone. Even trained professional's will only go in and make contact with the victim as last resort. Most victims are fairly close to shore and within reach. This is what we want the children to understand, that they need to try to reach out to the victim first and not jump in to help. Reach with a branch, paddle, piece of rope, or almost anything to extend your reach. Or throw them a flotation device of some type.

Key Words For The Board

Don't jump in. Reach.

Class Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson 4.

Ask the children why they think Oscar's friend is in trouble, and if they can spot the lack of a PFD?

Have them draw a PFD on Oscar's friend while in class or as part of the homework assignment.

Point out how Oscar is reaching out with a branch to help his friend. Explain that this is what they should do and do not try to jump in after someone if they are in trouble. The person they are trying to save by jumping in could pull them underwater.

Class Questions

Try to encourage creative thinking when asking the following questions. Offer them suggestions and hints as needed.

If someone was in trouble in swimming pool what could you use to reach him or her?

Possible responses: Pool cleaning pole, net, pool toys, garden hose, garden tools, towel, folding chair, water cannon, kick board, etc.

If you were on a boat and someone was in trouble what could you use to reach him or her? Or throw to them?

Possible responses: Paddle, ski rope, fishing pole, towel, ladder, water ski, flag, etc. Or you could throw them something like a PFD, floating seat cushion, inflatable inner tube, kneeboard, etc.

If you are on a shoreline at the river what could you use to reach him or her? Or throw to them?

Possible responses: Branch, fishing pole, beach towel, beach mat, folding chair, beach umbrella, rope, etc. Or throw them a PFD, or anything else that might be handy and floats like an air mattress, inner tube, empty ice chest, etc.

Close

Ask the children. What does Oscar say?

Children's Response:

***Reach from the Beach,
And don't jump in if someone can't swim.***

Lesson 5

Teacher Information

Even though a spot on a river or stream looks calm, it's still moving water and you could be swept away. You should always scout downstream of where you're going to play or cross to see if there are any hazards. If there is, then find another spot, because you could potentially be swept into it.

Key Words For The Board

Hydraulic. Hazard.

Class Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson 5, and look at the illustration.

Explain that next to where Oscar is standing it looks calm and he's thinking about swimming there. But he's scouting the river downstream first to see if there are any dangerous hazards. Even though it's calm where he's standing, it's still moving water and he could be swept downstream.

Tell them that it appears there are several hazards downstream and explain that the turbulent water at the bottom of the waterfall is called a hydraulic (refer to the board). These can be very dangerous and hard to get out of, and we'll learn more about these in the next lesson.

Class Questions

Ask the children if they can name 3 dangerous hazards that Oscar might see while scouting? Have them write their answers in the book.

Randomly ask the children what some of the hazards are that they spotted?

Possible answers: Rocks, boulders, waterfall, log, tree, hydraulic.

After looking at those hazards should Oscar go swimming there, or look for another spot to swim? Response should be look for another spot.

Close

Ask the children. What does Oscar say?

Children's response: *You otter scout before you go out.*

Lesson 6

Teacher Information

A low level dam, or often called a low head dam, is by far the most dangerous hazard on the river. Professional rescuers and engineers refer to them as drowning machines. These man made structures can range from 1 to 20 feet, or higher, and usually span the whole width of the river. They're used for diverting water, fish hatcheries, irrigation, or creating power. At the base of these dams is a deadly hydraulic that is inescapable and requires rescue to get out. These types of rescues are very difficult and usually very time consuming. Children should stay away from these at all costs.

Key Words For The Board

Low level dam

Hydraulic

No escape, rescue only

Class Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson 6 and study the illustration.

Ask them if they've ever seen these types of dams.

Explain that these low level dams are the most dangerous things on the river. They can be up to 20 feet high, but even the smaller ones like you see in the picture can be very, very dangerous. If you will notice in the picture, there is a hydraulic at the bottom of the dam, like we talked about when Oscar was scouting the waterfall. (refer to the word hydraulic on the board)

If you get caught in this kind of hydraulic you cannot escape, even with a PFD. Your only chance of getting out is by rescue, which can take much time. (refer to the board)

Always be on the look out for these on the river and do everything you can to avoid them.

Close

Ask the children. What does Oscar say?

Children's response: *You otter scam if you see a dam.*

Lesson 7

Teacher Information

This lesson will teach children about the defensive swimming position. This is on your back with your feet pointed down stream. In this position you can see ahead for hazards and for a place to get out. Turn your body at a 45-degree angle toward the side of the river you want to exit, start backstroking and the current will help push you in that direction. You can use your feet to push off rocks and logs. Also, your head is facing up and you're less likely to inhale water.

The teacher may want to consider using the skills portion of this lesson as a Physical Education Activity.

Key Words For Board

Defensive Swimming Position

Backstroke

Class Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson 7.

Let them know that the picture is Oscar, in the defense swimming position, moving across the water, and that it's not 3 Oscars they're seeing.

Explain that if you're swept down stream on a river you need to get in the defensive swimming position. This is on your back with your feet pointed down stream. This way you can see where you are going and watch for any hazards. And you can use your feet to push off logs or rocks if you encounter any. In this position, you will then start doing backstrokes.

Teacher demonstrates by waving arms doing several backstrokes.

Have them look at the illustration again and explain the Oscar decided that there was a good spot to get out on the left shore. So he turned his body at a slight angle to the left while he is doing his backstrokes, and the river current is helping to move him in that direction. And he keeps backstroking until he reaches shore. Explain that if he wanted to go to the right shore, then he would change his body position slightly to the right and do the same thing, keep backstroking.

Skills

Have the children move to a clear area where they can all lay down on their backs in the same direction, as if they are floating down stream. Have them start backstroking and turn their bodies at a slight angle to the right while continuing to backstroke. Now have them straighten out and then turn their bodies to the left and keep backstroking.

Next have them bend their legs at the knee and push out with their feet as if they were pushing themselves off a log or big rock that was in their way, all the while backstroking.

Repeat these drills as necessary until you are sure they understand these important concepts.

Have the children return to their seats and to the illustration.

Close

Ask the children. What does Oscar say?

Children's response: ***On your back to swim if you go in.***

Lesson 8

Teacher Information

This lesson addresses foot entrapment. This usually occurs when you're not in the proper defensive swimming position and you're floating down river with your feet dangling below the surface. Your foot can become lodged between rocks or some other snag. The force of the current pushes you over and pushes your face into the water. A PFD will help keep you afloat, but without one could result in drowning. Quite often the current is so strong that it is difficult to dislodge your foot and rescue becomes the only option. We want the children to understand that they need to maintain the defensive swim position, and swim all the way to shore before trying to stand up.

Key Words For The Board

Foot Entrapment

Snag

Discussion

Have the children open their books to lesson 8, and look at the top illustration.

Tell the children to observe how Oscar is in the proper swimming position with his feet out in front of him, and to notice how he's gliding over the rocks below him.

Now have them look at the bottom illustration. Explain that this is what can happen when you let your feet dangle down below the water while you're floating down river. Your feet can become lodged between rocks, or are caught on some other snag. Other snags can be logs, branches, fishing line, fence wire, or other sunken debris. When this happens, the current will push you forward like in the illustration. A PFD will help keep you afloat, but you are going to have to work at keeping your head above water. Without a PFD you could be in serious trouble. Because of the force of the water you are not going to be able to back up and dislodge your foot and will probably have to be rescued.

So, swim all the way to shore before you put your feet down or try to stand up.

Close

Ask the children. What does Oscar say?

Children's response: ***You otter not stand until you're on land***