

Trace the River's Path – Field Sketch Activity

Dells of the Eau Claire Segment
Teacher Activity Sheet

Learning Goal

Students will observe the Eau Claire River and sketch its path through the bedrock gorge, identifying places where the river flows quickly or slowly and noting features that indicate different rates of erosion.

Materials

- Clipboard or notebook
- Pencil
- Optional: Colored pencils (blue, dark blue, brown)

Safety Note

Students should sketch from an overlook or safe distance behind railings. No one should get close to the gorge edge or water.

Teacher Instructions

1. Introduce the idea (1 minute)

Explain that rivers do not flow in straight lines—their path is shaped by bedrock weaknesses, changes in slope, and the speed of flowing water.

2. Students sketch the river outline (3–4 minutes)

Students draw the basic shape of the river, bends or turns, and steep walls or ledges they observe. Remind them this is a scientific sketch, not an art project.

3. Add symbols for water speed (2–3 minutes)

Teach simple symbols: ///// for fast water (rapids), ~~~~ for slow water (pools), ● for plunge pools, and |---| for major ledges.

4. Add erosion hotspots (2 minutes)

Students mark an 'E' where they think the river is cutting into the rock the fastest—places with rapids, tight bends, or steep walls.

5. Share out (2–3 minutes)

Ask students where they placed erosion marks and why. Discuss how running water shapes rock.

Student Sketch Page

1. Draw the basic shape of the river, including bends and steep sides.
2. Add symbols for water speed:
 - ///// fast water (rapids)
 - ~~~~ slow water (pools)
 - • plunge pool
3. Mark erosion hotspots with an 'E'.
4. Answer the quick questions:
 - a. Where is the river moving the fastest?
 - b. Where is it slowest?
 - c. Why do you think the gorge is narrow here?
 - d. What might this place look like in the future?

