

Tips On Using STARLAB

by Joyce Kloncz

The first time you use STARLAB is an exciting event! If you are using it as a classroom teacher or as a planetarium director, you'll want to make sure you are prepared for your students before you begin. Here are some ideas that have been used in the past for a successful STARLAB program.

1. Try to set up STARLAB a day ahead of time so you are ready and comfortable before the children come. After following the set-up directions in the front of the Set-up/Operation section, take some time in STARLAB preparing for your first visitors.
2. Find some interesting planetarium music to play when your students arrive. (A favorite of my school children is "Celestial Soda Pop" by Fresh Aire VI – Orpheus).
3. Plan some classroom management techniques for students. It is important that they know your expectations in advance. In a dark classroom like STARLAB, it's important to be consistent, but caring!! Here are some tried and true techniques:
 - Make sure there are two adults to maintain safety
 - When entering STARLAB, have two children hold the door flaps open.
 - Set a small fluorescent lantern in the doorway (available from Radio Shack).
 - The teacher should go in first, turn on the projector side lights, and have the children follow in single file.
 - Have the students sit completely around the inside edge of the STARLAB floor, "on their pockets," but not up against the STARLAB wall. This is their seat for the duration (I suggest that teachers shouldn't allow seat-changing while in STARLAB).
 - Make sure the students don't block the inflation/ventilation tube.
 - Have a red flashlight available that will help to spot any problems.
 - When leaving, the teacher should be the last one out.
4. Look through the cylinder information and decide in advance what you will do. If you are going to be taking children into STARLAB only once, plan a lesson that will be easy to do. For instance, show the Greek Mythology Cylinder and tell the stories about four easy-to-find constellations, such as Orion, Big Bear and Little Bear, and Cassiopeia. (See the Greek Mythology Cylinder section). Then show the Constellation Cylinder and with an arrow pointer, show the students where those four constellations are on that cylinder. Next, show the Starfield Cylinder and point out the same four constellations. Have children look carefully at the night sky, then close their eyes and imagine what the constellations look like. When they open their eyes, see if they can still find the constellations. With older students, have them use the star maps and arrow pointers with teams of students to find the constellations. If you can accomplish all of this, the students will have had a wonderful introduction to STARLAB.
5. When you take students in again, add some constellation stories to the ones you told the first time. If time allows, show the Earth Cylinder (see the Earth Cylinder curriculum section) or other cylinders. Try some activities from your Planetarium Activities for Student Success (PASS) volumes — see pages 36, 37 in this section for a series description. (Did you remember to send in your Product Registration form to receive these free volumes?)
6. It's important that the students realize that you are learning along with them. If they ask you questions that you can't answer, simply tell them that you'll find the answer together. Don't think that you have to know all of the answers the first time in STARLAB. Your confidence will grow each time you are in STARLAB.