

Can Rockhounding Improve Various Skills?

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An article noted on Sciencedaily.com* indicated that there is a tendency for technology to produce a decline in critical thinking and analysis. A study by an LA psychology professor also indicated a decline in "reading for pleasure." Further analysis of the article stated that learning has changed as a result of computers, interaction with the Internet, and video games.

Those of us who have experienced all the technological changes in the past 30 to 40 years don't need a doctorate or professorship to make such deductions. Take a look at a 5-6 year old grandchild who is more adept at playing GameBoy® than turning book pages. Try Internet access with your dialup computer after school lets out for the day (Yes, I'm a Slowski; no COMCAST Highspeed®.) Watch newscasts and listen to furor over a violent or R-rated video game. Last but not least, do you ever see as many children outside in nice weather as when you were a kid?

The process of learning and growing up these days is dictated by technology. Utilizing technology should be a process of learning to achieve a balance in living and learning. Reading and visual skills should complement each other.

The article premise is fairly well summarized by the following statement: "Most visual media are real-time media that do not allow time for reflection, analysis, or imagination." Most modes of technology offer immediate answers, reward, or problem solving. Vocabulary development also suffers.

Technology is not the sole answer to learning and development because vital skills are being lost. Today's youngsters may be largely print illiterate, fail to think critically, or visualize concepts. They may become distant, isolated, and lack social skills. Headlines have already noted that many fail to get adequate exercise and outdoor activity.

Our youth need something better to do in order to develop their intellectual, reading, digital, and manipulative skills. What is my answer to helping young people (or anyone) develop reading, vocabulary, visual, and tactile keenness? My answer: try introducing them to rockhounding.

For most of us it is a good bet that our first introduction to rocks and mineral was through a class in school followed by a book in a public or school library. Others may have first experienced mineral wonders by seeing the collection of a relative, parent, or friend. Still others may have experienced discovery of an unusual rock or even a chance fossil during a hike or outing. We then experienced wonder at just what they had seen or found.

Reading books and articles about our hobby excites the imagination and initiates an urge for outdoor exploration. Seeing pictures in both books and on the Internet may facilitate the search for interesting, collectible rocks, minerals and fossils or collecting locations. Through use of both books and computers a collector can acquire skilful recognition of formations, rocks, and minerals to be utilized when out in the field.

Can rockhounding help you improve your vision? After some experience as a rockhound your answer may be "Yes". After years of collecting a rockhound may have better vision at arm's length.

If you have ever distinguished a delicate crystal pattern on a rocky surface or in a small pocket without aide of a magnifier or a tiny red garnet crystal nestled in a sea of smoky quartz; If you have kicked over a rock you observed to be "just a little different" along a rocky path and found an exquisite fossil on the underside or if you have ever visually isolated a single fossilized clam shell from a rather mundane sedimentary rock-strewn landscape, only to shortly find a whole bed of brown Brachs, then you realize that rockhounding has improved your visual acuteness.

Can skills exercised by rockhounding aide you in everyday matters? A keen eye developed by looking down at the ground in search of minerals or fossils may help locate a set of car keys tracked to a snow bank. A discerning eye can differentiate a copper penny or a silver coin of any denomination on a street or sidewalk after darkness sets in and without aide of a fluorescent lamp

or flashlight. If you have ever picked up one of your wife's lost beads or findings from the floor in a roomful of carpeting, then you would say rockhounding has provided you skills to solving some everyday problems.

Another benefit of rockhounding is motor skills. Rockhound experience in field trimming a specimen develops accuracy. There may be fewer sore fingers on home projects using hammers after field experience with a rock hammer. Field experience with a diamond cutting saw may help make home use of a circular saw a cinch (without removing one of your appendages).

Rockhounding may prove helpful in improving social and leadership skills. One person reads a book then shares information and a picture. A specimen is collected and shown to others. Soon a network of excited rockhounds forms a group. The group becomes a club (if one is not already established). The club has a show. The show provides activities, books, specimens, and lots of people socializing who are enjoying a variety of learning activities, experiences, and situations all dealing with rocks and minerals or fossils. Club people then reinvest time and money in additional group and educational pursuits. Many rockhounds are elected to club offices or serve on committees and write about their experiences for the club newsletters.

Last but not least, rockhounding may improve your knowledge of business matters. Once you have accumulated an almost inexhaustible pile of rocks, minerals and fossils, you can supplement other excursions and trips by selling your finds at club nights, at other shows, or out of your home or another location.

A final provoking thought from research... "More than 85 percent of video games contain violence, and multiple studies of violent media games have shown that they can produce many negative effects, including aggressive behavior and desensitization to real-life violence." Misdirection of technology can be a disastrous waste of time. Directionless youth need to develop a more meaningful pastime.

Rockhounds learn very quickly that their hobby is an excellent outlet for life's little frustrations and tensions. Did you ever notice that some of the calmest and coolest rockhounds you know are the ones wielding large sledges that reduce boulders to collectible smaller pieces?

Rockhounding is an excellent experience for all ages. Most rockhounds are extremely helpful in providing a meaningful demonstration for others as to how to identify and collect specimens. Field experiences require combined skills of walking or hiking to a collection site, visual identification of a potentially productive vug or formation, specimen selection, mentally planning a method of extraction and physical exertion applied with tools to remove material from a rocky host matrix. Once a specimen is collected rockhounds are usually on a collecting high filled with enough excitement to continue on to other adventures.

So, get the kids (grownups, too) a book about rockhounding. Show them your collection. Introduce them to a night with the club. Invite them out to join in an outdoor collecting activity. Tell them how rockhounding will help improve many aspects of their lives through development of visual, physical and social skills.

After several field collecting experiences rockhound novices should be eager, more knowledgeable and on the way to seeking more collecting experiences. They will be thanking you before long and will soon be showing others their discoveries from the wide world of rockhounding. ε

Reference: source of inspiration and interpretation, an article of fact and speculation.

*University of California - Los Angeles. "Is Technology Producing A Decline In Critical Thinking and Analysis?"

ScienceDaily 29 January 2009.

<<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/01/090128092341.htm>>.