

Nature Journaling

Objective: Through observation and recording, students will gain a sense of ownership for the unit of study in which journaling is applied. Students will improve writing and drawing skills. Students will sharpen data collection and analysis skills. Students will recognize journaling as a tool for both technical recording and self-expression.

Materials: Paper; a sketchbook, notebook, piece of paper with clipboard (see more in Procedure), pencils; lead and colored, pens; ballpoint, felt tip, etc., markers, brushes, inks, water and watercolors, field guides and reference materials (On level AND those used by professionals in the field. Students respond positively to this challenge.) **Optional:** Hand lenses, flashlight, and gloves. Bring something to sit on—a newspaper in a plastic bag works fine. It encourages students to get closer and stay longer. Introducing cut outs from magazines or the students own photography is usually very successful.

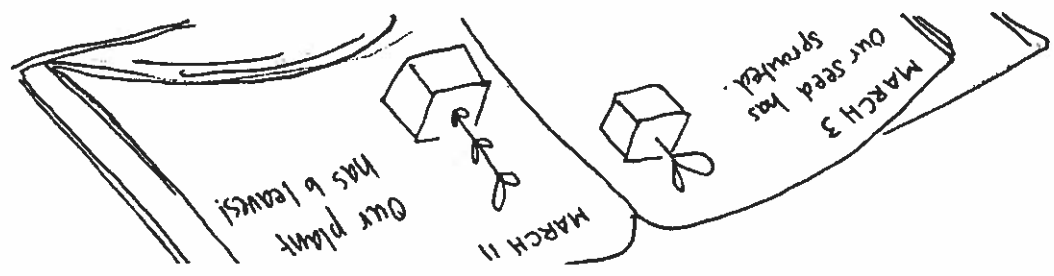
Skills: Reading/Writing, Communication, Using Scientific Tools, Research, Critical Thinking, Observe/Compare.
Subject/Discipline: Science, Language Arts, Expressive Arts, & extensions into other disciplines
Science Standards: SS, S6, S7, S8
Time: One or more class meetings. May also appear as a short unit within another lesson.

EVERYBODY ANYWHERE

ACTIVITY SUMMARY: This lesson provides a starting point for educators who wish to introduce journaling as a unit for interdisciplinary or similar lessons, to create a record of a specific event, adoption as a regular group activity, or all of the above. It is intended to reassure the beginner and inspire the expert. This lesson includes starting points, materials options, and how-to's.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Journals are an excellent tool for linking the different subjects and disciplines in a cross-curricular unit or program. They foster clear communication skills, data recording, creative expression, and at the end of the program, the parent, child, and teacher will have a complete record of what the child gained from the program. Journals can be used in many ways: to record scientific data, to take notes, to keep dried specimens (pressed leaves, flowers), to make drawings or sketches, to record thoughts or feelings, or to use as a scrapbook (photographs, keepsakes). They yield a detailed record of time spent, and therefore an excellent assessment tool for educators. There are no rules or limits to how journals may be created or applied, but it may be helpful to discuss three types you may use in a little more detail.



Scientific Observation
 This format is applied when one is using a journal to document an experiment or activity in the classroom or in the field. It should speak to the principles of the scientific method. It should include a question one is trying to answer or a hypothesis one is trying to test. The educator or group should define parameters for how observations, data, and conclusions should be recorded and what this content should reflect when complete.

Mixing drawings and photos can create a stronger sense of place. This has become easier with the popularity of digital cameras.

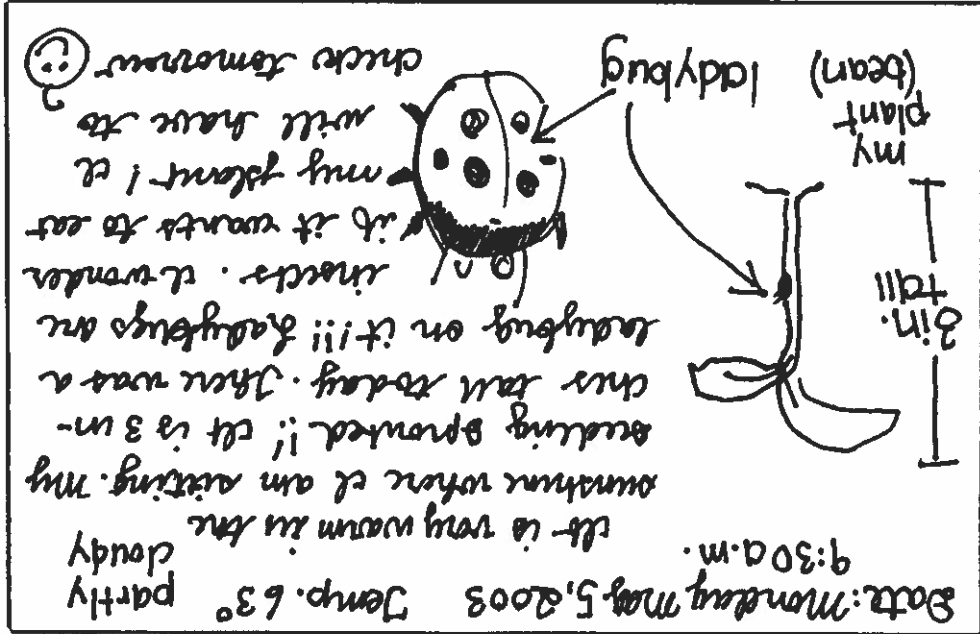


Reflection
 Directed or undirected, reflection entries always yield positive results, both on the page and in the attitude and well being of the journaler. As part of a "place-based" education approach, it will allow students some quiet time to create a personal connection with a place. These connections may become lasting relationships through repeat visits inspired by the drawings or writings done on that first day.

Reflection entries allow one to step back and consider what is taking place before them.

*Are there other people? What are they doing?
 What about plants? Animals?
 How are they interacting with me?*

Event/Narrative Recording
 This approach is one that is most commonly associated with nature journaling, and the one concerning the lesson plan here. Narratives offer a record of an activity, planned or happenstance, with room for interpretation.



PROCEDURE:

Getting Started

Whether your students are making their own journals or using sketchbooks, spend some time creating/decorating a cover so they will be able to not only identify their journals, but also identify with them.

Some ideas: Marker and colored pencil decorations, magazine cut out collage, felt or fabric covering, or leaves or other dried natural items applied with contact paper.

Now that the student journals are ready – figuring out how to get started may seem like the hardest part!

If this is a new exercise, you may wish to have your first journaling session in a familiar setting. The classroom will work just fine for this purpose.

Here is a starter exercise:

Tell the students:

1. Find something in your desk or book bag that is "a lot like you."
2. Draw a picture of it on a journal page.
3. Write a few paragraphs that answer the following questions:

What is it?
 What can it do? (With your help probably)
 Why do you think this item is a lot like you?

Going Outside

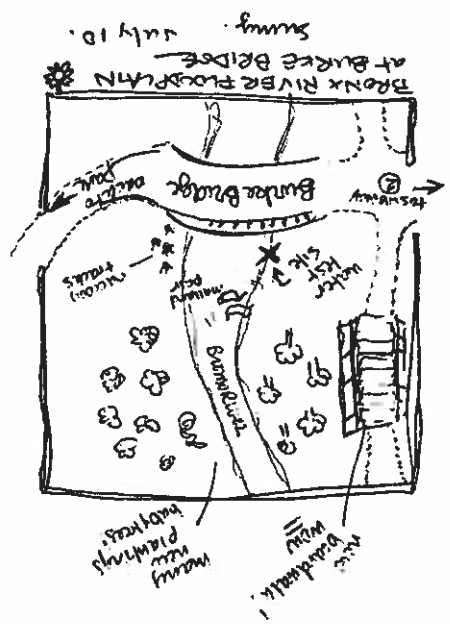
Here are some questions to get your students started. Ask:

Do you like to be outside? If not, where would you like to be?
 How do you feel about animals? About plants?
 Have you ever noticed something that no one else had? Do you ever notice birds? Strange insects?

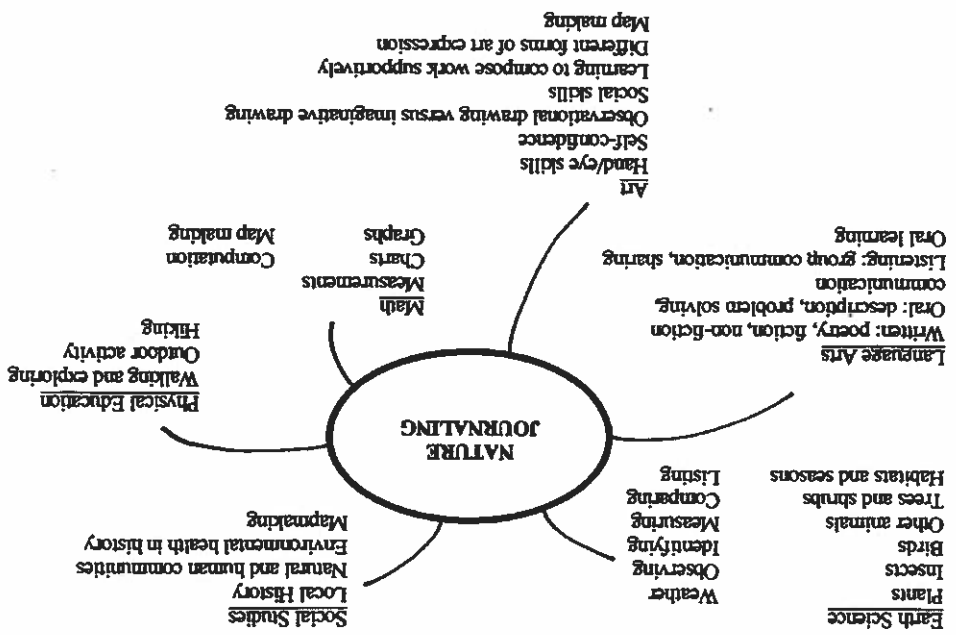
What can you do to remember something? What it looks like, where it was, if it was doing anything... How can you explain an event or thing to another person who was not there, and you yourself are unfamiliar with the event or the thing?



Drawing maps of an area can make concepts and a field visit all the more real.



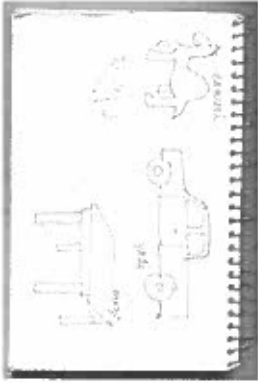
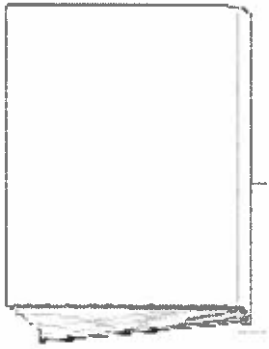
Source: *Keeping a Nature Journal*, Walker-Leslie & Roth, 2000, p. 165.



A CURRICULUM WEB FOR NATURE JOURNALING:

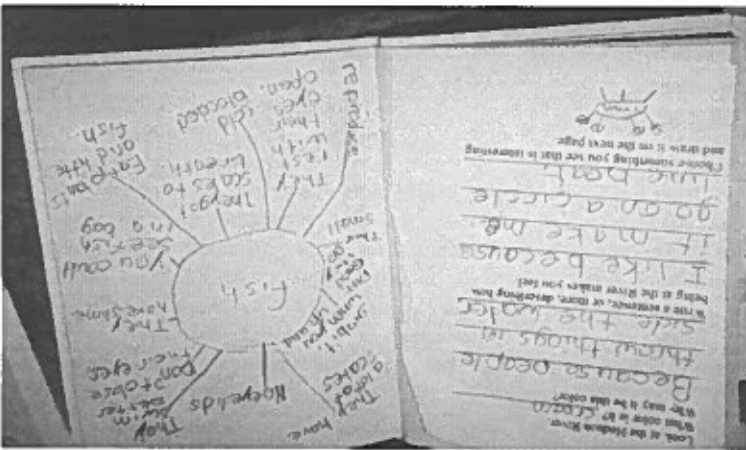
A journal is an excellent addition to end of the year student portfolio reviews, that are now a part of many school curriculums.

ASSESSMENT:
 When working with students in non-formal settings, it is important to be clear about the activity and the behavior expected beforehand. It is difficult to assess the success of many hands-on activities if they are colored by disciplinary problems and disruptions.
 Practice simpler activities beforehand.
 If it is necessary to convert journaling work in to a grade, it is helpful to set up a 4-point rubric: 4 – Excellent, 3 – Good, 2 – Fair, 1 – Unsatisfactory.
 Consider the level your group is working at, and consider the new skills they have obtained through these exercises.
 Some criteria would include: ideas & content, vocabulary and/or word choice, organization, voice, and presentation.
 **Regarding drawing skills: in this application it would not be appropriate to grade students on artistic talents. It is best to think about the level of effort and what they were trying to accomplish.



- Half-sized Notebooks, or "Composition Books" for example, are inexpensive and have lots of pages. Many brands feature very light lines, so when the lines are not in use, they are not a distraction.
- Wire-bound Sketchbooks (not glue-bound, as the pages fall out) – Smaller than 8.5" x 11" are best. Many of these have 100+ pages, which may seem overwhelming to the novice.
- Bound [sewn binding] Sketchbooks – Usually found in art stores and have many pages. However, "Bare Books" by Tricorp Publishing (800-255-9228, www.barebooks.com) are geared for student use having ~30 blank pages and blank paper covers that accept all sorts of media. This is a very nice choice if you have the budget (~\$2/student) and are buying for the entire class.

Store-Bought:



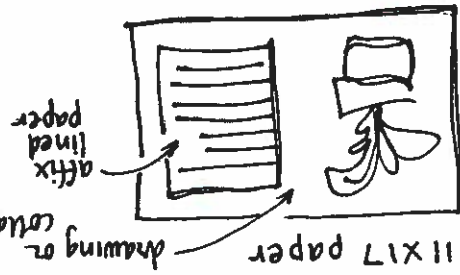
The Journal Itself
There is literally a world of possibilities. For our purposes, let's narrow it down to two categories: Store-Bought and Make-Your-Own.

Make Your Own.

- "Loose Leaf" -- Collect a series of works over time (the same size) and then bind them with string, brads, etc. Loose paper can be kept under control inexpensively by using a cardboard clipboard: 9" x 12" (or size that accommodates your paper) or pieces of corrugated cardboard with a large rubber band around. These really add a level or "professionalism" and importance that younger students really respond to.

- Folded -- Using inexpensive drawing or copier paper* (8.5" x 11", 8.5" x 14" or 11" x 17"), fold in half and use a long armed stapler to bind in the center or a short stapler to fasten along the edges. Use colored masking tape to decorate/protect/cover the staples.
 *If you like you can "pre-line" copier paper by making a template like the one shown, and running off as many one sided copies as you need creating a mix of blank and lined pages in the journal.

BIG



SMALL



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