



# Nature Journaling

**Program Purpose:** The purpose of this program is to excite students about environmental writing and to deepen their connections to nature.

**Program Length:** 1-1 1/2 hours

**Program Age:** 4th-12th

**Maximum number of participants:** 20 students

## Objectives:

After completing this activity students should walk away with

- Ideas that they can use for continued nature journaling
- The names of several influential nature writers
- New perspectives and connections with natural elements

## Preparation:

Before class arrives, set up and gather materials.

## Materials:

Cardboard from recycled boxes, one-sided paper (recycled) cut in half, pictures (old nature magazines, cards, calendars, etc), pencils, markers, crayons, glue, scissors, hole punches, and yarn.

## Basic Outline:

- I. Intro. (5 min)
- II. Make journals (20 min)
- III. Warm-up Activities (20 min)
- IV. Journaling activities (10 min)
- V. Conclusion (5 min)

## Introduction

For centuries, people have been writing down their observations and thoughts about nature in journals: explorers like Lewis and Clark kept a journal full of writings and drawings from their adventures; sea captains kept records of weather, constellations, and the birds they saw; farmers and scientists kept track of when natural events happened, like the first robin returning in spring or the first snowfall of the year (the study of when natural events happen is called phenology); and great writers used their journals as places to record what they saw and felt about the environment. People like: Rachel Carson, Sigurd Olson, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, Henry David

Thoreau, and John Muir. Read a quote or several from Appendix A, depending upon the age of the group.

## Create Journals

Students will have to share scissors and glue sticks. Instruct students on how to put their journal together. Depending upon time available, it's probably wise to have students decorate only the front cover of their journal, and allow them to do the back when they get home. There are a few sample journals in the Nature Journaling Box that students can flip through if they have time.

## Warm-up Activities

Any day is a good day to start a nature journal. Henry David Thoreau, an influential American writer, started his Walden project when someone asked: "*What are you doing now?*" "*Do you keep a journal?*" That very day he made his first entry, and today his journal has been published and is very well-known. Inform students that any page of their nature journal should include the time, date, and place of their entry. Then, start off with an activity or several to get the students' minds going. There are many options:

- **Free Drawing:** Students draw a scene before them (a stream or tree for example) without looking at the paper as they sketch.
- **Gesture Drawing:** Students draw an object with quick strokes in 5 seconds, then in 10, then in 15. This helps students to simply draw without worrying about whether it is good or not.
- **Memory Drawing:** Place a natural object on the floor before the group and give them a few minutes to really study it. Take it away and have them draw or describe the object. They can compare their observations to the real thing later.
- **Object Details:** Pass out a small rock, acorn, or leaf to each student. Have them draw the item in precise detail, much like a scientist would, or have them describe the object's history and any journeys it may have made.
- **Word Drawing:** Students create a picture of a natural object using descriptive words instead of lines (leaves work nicely for this).
- **Personal Trees:** Students close their eyes and picture a tree—any tree. Then have them take a few minutes to draw it. Talk about how everyone's is a little different.
- **Sound Maps:** Students close their eyes and really listen to the world around them. They can then either describe the sounds in words, or create a sound map with an X in the middle to mark where they are seated and drawings of the sounds they heard in the general direction that they heard them.
- **Meet a Tree:** Students take turns leading a blind-folded partner to a tree that they explore with their sense of

touch. Make sure that students gently lead their partner. Students can then write or draw impressions of the tree they felt. At the end of the activity, their partners reveal which tree they were introduced to.

- **Picture Time:** Students take turns leading a blind-folded partner to a scene or object that catches their fancy. Encourage students to choose creative views and angles. They then arrange their partner's hands in the shape of a square and announce "click." Their partner can then take off the blindfold and study the image to write/draw about later.
- **Touch Bag:** Going with the blindfold theme, give each pair a bag with different natural objects in it. One person will choose an item for the other to feel and then draw, and vice versa.
- **Descriptive Drawing:** Students sit back to back with a partner. One student will pick a natural item to describe to their partner. The partner will then draw the object. The two can look at the drawing to see if it matches the object.
- **Scientific Sketches:** Instruct students to find a plant-any plant within the boundaries to sketch or describe.
- **Nature Haiku:** Students can create a haiku about a topic of their choice or one that you've provided. The format is 5-7-5 syllables per line. Examples are in Appendix A.
- **Group Poem:** Give students a scrap of paper each and have them write one descriptive or connected word about rain, wind, fire, or trees, etc. Collect the scraps and read the words at random, creating a flowing poem.

### **Solo Journaling**

After the warm up activities, allow the children to free write for 10-15 minutes. Remind them to use all of their senses, to really observe closely and from different angles, and to just write/draw—it doesn't have to be perfect it's just for them. Have students from a circle in an open area, and then have everyone walk ten steps away from the circle and write and explore there. You could also just have each student choose their own spot. Provide the group with physical boundaries for this activity and ask the adults to help you supervise. You can throw out a few ideas for the group to try if they need inspiration:

- Draw a plant or leaf in detail
- Draw or describe the world from an ant or a bird's point of view
- Write a journal entry as a stream, a tree, a rock, or an earthworm. What do they do all day? What do they think of humans? Where have they journeyed?
- Write a poem--vertical poems are fun (a word is written vertically and then each letter starts a sentence horizontally that relates to the word)

- Sit quietly and observe an animal. What might it be thinking? Where is it going?
- Describe a favorite wild place
- Use all of their senses to describe a natural object
- Describe a natural phenomenon like a thunderstorm
- Look for animal signs; draw them and guess who left them
- Stare at the clouds and create a story about the shapes there
- Draw a natural alphabet where the C could be drawn as a curled caterpillar, etc.
- Start a page with "I wonder....."
- Create lists of the things around you: sounds, smells, sights, colors, etc.
- Find a particularly interesting pattern to draw

### **Conclusion**

Encourage students to continue filling their journals when they go home; the more they write the better they will become. They can use their journal to make scientific observations, to improve their artwork and writing, or as an outlet for their thoughts and emotions about the environment. It doesn't matter where they journal--even cities have nature in them. Sigurd Olson once wrote of his favorite writing place, "*I named this place Listening Point because only when one comes to listen, only when one is aware and still, can things be seen and heard. Everyone has a listening-point somewhere. It does not have to be in the north or close to the wilderness, but some place of quiet where the world can be contemplated with awe.*"

### **Resources:**

Hoffman, Kate, *Nature Journaling*, Central Wisconsin Environmental Station, University of Wisconsin ~ Stevens Point, 10186 County Road MM ~ Amherst Junction, WI 54407

Jane Goodall Institute, *Nature Journaling Scavenger Hunt*, Roots and Shoots, © 2003, <http://www.rootsandshoots.org>

Leslie, Marie Walker and Charles E. Roth. Keeping a Nature Journal. China: C & C Offset Printing © 2000.