

# L1 Nature Journaling: Experience the Outdoors Through Writing and Drawing

► SEASONS: 🍁 ❄️ 🌸

► SUBJECTS: 📖 🗣️

► PREP TIME: ⌚

► EXT. SUBJECT: 📖

► LESSON TIME: ⌚ → ⌚

## Description

Students focus their powers of observation on natural components of the environment. The lesson emphasizes attention to detail in both written observations and sketches. Preparation for this lesson involves finding an appropriate outdoor location for students to spend time journaling, gathering lesson materials, and reviewing the Nature Journaling Rubric.

The lesson begins with a class discussion about nature journals as a way to absorb and reflect on what is going on beyond the doorstep. Naturalists' sketches often include measurements, notes about their observations, and even labels or questions (see Online Connections for samples).

The process of journaling helps the class think about what is happening outdoors, during this particular season, this time of day, and in this particular place. Students shouldn't think of nature journaling as a show of artistry. Rather, it is their chance to record their thoughts about what they see, hear, and feel in a particular moment in a particular place. When they see something interesting, students should make a quick sketch (that takes about a minute to draw) and label the size, color, name (if known), and any other details. Messiness is all right because they can refresh their work once indoors.

While sharing their observations, students can work in groups to classify objects they observed. What characteristics are similar or different? How did individuals focus on different aspects of similar objects?

Students can expand their sensory descriptions through the "What Am I?" riddle extension. Using adjectives to describe objects, students create riddles for their classmates to solve.



## MATERIALS

*For each student:* paper and/or nature journal, or an artist sketchbook, plus pencil, magnifying lens, measuring tape or ruler, something hard to write on (such as a clipboard or book).  
*Optional supplies:* binoculars, thermometers, bug boxes, something to sit on, field guides, and magnifying lens.





## TIPS AND TRICKS

Have students make their own journals if notebooks or sketchbooks aren't available. Fold paper in half, hole-punch two holes on the fold, and use string or ribbon to tie pages together. Add blank pages as needed. Heavy paper or light cardboard can also be used for a journal cover, which is especially helpful if clipboards aren't available.

Journal with your students! You'll notice new things and be a model for your students.

Younger students can dictate labels and other observations.

Try to focus comments on journal accuracy rather than artistry to encourage detailed and accurate observations, rather than just pretty pictures.

To keep children in a management area, use hula hoops to designate observation spaces. Students can then explore the space inside the hula hoops.



## Objectives

- Convert direct observation into detailed written description and artwork.
- Classify objects according to observable characteristics.
- Differentiate between living and nonliving things.
- Recognize that people interact with the environment through their senses.

## Background Information

Nature journaling offers us the opportunity to observe and record perceptions and feelings about the natural world. Nature journaling is a way to record information about our immediate surroundings. Drawings on cave walls are ways people long ago depicted information about experiences in nature. Other examples include sea captains' logs of weather, constellations, and birds, as well as more traditional nature journals done by those engaged by the natural world.

Sketches and written notes do not have to be artistic or beautiful, but they should help the observer focus on an object and notice the finer details and interesting or unusual characteristics. Nature journals usually include some brief written information about the place, date, time, weather, and changes from past visits. Through a variety of techniques (writing, sketching, photos, leaf rubbings, etc.), the journals can then be used to depict sights, sounds, smells, and even tactile experiences.

## Procedure

1. In the classroom, discuss journaling. What is a journal? Has anyone ever kept a diary? Does anyone love to draw outside? Students can bring in journals to share or can make a sample journal entry to share.
2. Introduce nature journaling as a way to experience and learn about the natural world. Review the Nature Journaling Rubric.
3. For the first time out nature journaling, provide a specific assignment, such as finding three different kinds of leaves on the ground or comparing two different kinds of insects. Also, write the following on the board, so students can use it on each page of their journals: date, time, temperature in degrees Fahrenheit, and the weather: sunny, cloudy, overcast, or rain.
4. Lead students on a walk through the school grounds (see Tips for Teaching Outdoors, p. 1) or other natural setting. Encourage students to spread out and allow 20 to 30 minutes to explore, observe, and sketch.

5. Everyone can share discoveries in small groups, which can be done back in the classroom or while outside. Did students notice different things about their objects? Do the objects share similar characteristics? Groups can classify their objects into categories and discuss their classification with the class. Which things do you think were living or not living?

6. For future nature journaling, students can cut a window out of a piece of cardboard and use it to frame close-up views and wide-angle vistas. Journaling can occur regularly to note seasonal changes and other variations.



**Assessment**

NATURE JOURNALING RUBRIC	4	3	2	1
General Information	Provides detailed and thorough information about the place, day, time, and weather conditions.	Provides basic information about the place, day, time, and weather conditions.	Provides only some information about either the place, day, time, or weather conditions.	Provides no information about the place, day, time, or weather conditions.
Written Observation	Describes observations with rich and relevant details, description, and/or explanations.	Describes observations with relevant details, description, and/or explanations.	Description includes a few relevant details, description, and/or explanations.	Description does not include relevant details, description, and/or explanations.
Sketches	Includes sketches showing observation of realistic details that are labeled or described accurately and include measurements.	Includes sketches showing some observation of details that are labeled or described accurately and/or include measurements.	Includes sketches that either aren't labeled or aren't very accurate. May or may not include measurements. Doesn't include sketches.	Doesn't include sketches.

## WHAT AM I?

I feel

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I look

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I smell

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I sound

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## SAMPLE "WHAT AM I?" RIDDLE FOR AN ERASER

I make things disappear.

I am often pink, but can be different colors.

I like to ride on things that write.

I am somewhat soft. What am I?

*Final clue:* People use me when they make mistakes.

## SERVICE LEARNING

**NATURE JOURNALING:  
TAKE A SENIOR FOR A WALK**  
Contact your local Senior Citizen's Club for volunteers. Partner up seniors and students for the nature walk. Serve refreshments and reflect on the experience. Write illustrated thank you notes that include what the students learned.

## English Language Arts Extension: Descriptive Riddle

Students can use their observations to write up a "What am I" riddle to exchange with classmates. Emphasize using their senses (touch, smell, sound, sight) to find adjectives to describe the object observed. Encourage creativity with the riddles through clever jokes or tricky descriptions. Students might also want to add a final clue or hint to share, in case the class cannot guess the object.

Another variation or way to warm up for this exercise is to place a common object (e.g., a pencil, sponge, envelope, or paper clip) in a brown paper lunch bag. Give a bag to partners and ask them to describe the object without giving away what it is. They can then present their riddles to the class and the class tries to guess the object. Each pair of students should have a bag with a different object in it.



## Resources

Fletcher, Ralph, and Krudup, Walter Lyon (ill.). Ordinary Things: Poems from a Walk in the Early Spring. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1997.

*Collection of poems focused on the sights and feelings experienced on a springtime walk from home, through the woods, and back again.*

Leslie, C. W., and Roth, C. Keeping a Nature Journal: Discover a Whole New Way of Seeing the World Around You. North Adams, MA: Storey, 2000.

*Simple methods to start an ongoing nature journal, including numerous journal examples and teaching techniques.*

## Online Connections

Visit the Berkshire Museum’s Living Landscapes pages at [www.berkshireremuseum.org/programs/educators.html](http://www.berkshireremuseum.org/programs/educators.html) for the following online activities or resources:

- Sample naturalist journals
- Online sharing of nature poetry and writing
- Writers with connections to the Berkshires
- Published poems, essays, and stories about the natural world

MASSACHUSETTS FRAMEWORKS		
Science: Earth and Space Science: Earth's Materials	Pre K-2	1. Recognize that water, rocks, soil, and living organisms are found on the earth's surface.
Science: Life Science: Characteristics of Living Things	Pre K-2	2. Differentiate between living and nonliving things. Group both living and nonliving things according to the characteristics they share.
	Grades 3-5	1. Recognize that animals (including humans) and plants are living things that grow, reproduce, and need food, air, and water.
Science: Life Science: Living Things and Their Environment	Pre K-2	6. Recognize that people and other animals interact with the environment through their senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.
ELA: Language: Standard 1 Discussion	Pre K-4	1. Follow agreed-on rules for discussion (raising one's hand, waiting one's turn, speaking one at a time).  3. Apply understanding of agreed-on rules and individual roles in order to make decisions.
ELA: Language: Standard 2 Questioning, Listening, and Contributing	Pre K-4	1. Contribute knowledge to class discussion in order to develop a topic for a class project.
ELA: Reading and Literature: Standard 7 Beginning Reading	Pre K-4	1. Demonstrate understanding of the forms and functions of written English.  4. Demonstrate understanding of the various features of written English.
Arts: Visual Arts: Standard 3 Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression	Grades K-4	1. Create 2D and 3D artwork from direct observation.
Arts: Visual Arts: Standard 10: Interdisciplinary Connections	Grades K-4	1. Integrate knowledge of dance, music, theater, and visual arts and apply the arts to learning other disciplines.
	Grades 5-8	2. Continue the above and apply knowledge of other disciplines in learning in and about the arts.

The lesson also addresses the Massachusetts Science and Technology Curriculum Framework’s Science Skills of Inquiry.