

## Nature Journaling – Not Your Usual Lab Notebook [ME]

\*Adapted from Camp Friedenswald\*

**Grades:** 9-12

**Time:** 45 minutes to 1 hour

**Goals:** To create a nature journal based on outdoor observations.

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to: make detailed observations about their natural surroundings using all their senses; gain experience making drawings or sketches of their natural surroundings; learn basic nature drawing techniques; and formulate questions about their natural surroundings.

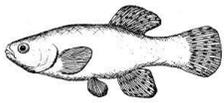
### **Materials:**

Small pocket-sized notebooks (weather resistant if possible)

Pencils

### **Procedures:**

1. Pre-Activity (introduction): Begin by asking the students whether they have ever gone hiking or observed nature before. Some students may say they've been hiking or running, but they probably haven't observed nature. Ask the students if they've ever journaled or kept a diary or blogged. Explain that scientists use observation as a form of non-invasive study (they don't have to take specimens back to a lab) and they will be learning some simple techniques of observation and nature journaling. Some of the details of nature journaling come from diary writing or blogging.
2. Activity: Pass out the small notebooks to the students and make sure they label them as their own. The first entry will be dated with the date of the activity. Explain that the date is very important when nature journaling because their observations will be directly reflected in the time of year and any seasonal changes occurring. Once you reach your designated area (park or school grounds), have the students test their observation skills by allowing them approximately five minutes to familiarize themselves with their surroundings. Make sure they record the initial time of their observation in their notebooks and have them record any descriptive weather-related observations (including air temperature, wind, cloud cover, etc.). Ask them to first cover their ears so that they are only using their eyes to see everything around them. Then ask them to cover their eyes so they are only using their ears. Have them record what they see and hear.



After these initial observations, take time on the trails and allow them the opportunity to explore. They must not use their voices (will be difficult at first) and they must not use any electronic devices while conducting their observations (these will distract them from nature journaling). They should spread themselves out so as not to disturb each other and pick one area of the park (or school grounds) to focus on. This could be a specific tree, a wooded area, the understory, or even an animal they might find. Using words, drawings, and description, they are to journal for twenty minutes. Ask them to focus their journaling on finding contrasts (color, texture, light/dark, etc.).

3. Post-Activity (review): Your review of the lesson can be done outside or back in the classroom. Discuss what the students experienced when they turned off their own voices and their electronic devices and turned on their other senses. If some of the students would like to share their journal entries, encourage this type of participation. Discuss why these types of observations help scientists when they have returned back to their laboratories or offices.

**Key Words:**

Nature journaling

Contour drawing

Scenic sketch

**Background Information:**

\*Adapted from California Native Plant Society\*

Keeping a nature journal allows students to have a better understanding of the natural world. Scientists will use a journal to record and preserve their observations in the field to be able to write reports of their findings at a later date. For students, it is a great way to refine their cognitive skills and utilize critical thinking to produce hypotheses pertaining to the environment. When using drawings or descriptive words, students are broadening their perspectives and allowing themselves to observe the natural characteristics, behaviors, and interactions of species. With respect to drawing, students do not have to have artistic talent, but simple sketches could turn into contour drawings when small details are added, such as shading, color, shape, and size in relation to other known objects. When working with scenic sketches, details are not as important as the overall landscape design.

From nature journaling, teachers can have students present their findings and observations to the class. Through their journals, students can write reports, give oral presentations, or create diagrams of their observations. Group work brings in different perspectives of the same observation and allows students to see what it is like to work on a scientific team. Teachers have the ability to evaluate students' understanding of the natural world more clearly by setting observational guidelines when journaling and it proves how well students follow instructions, use all of their senses, and use deductive reasoning to explain how the natural world works.