

We chose 4 Nature Journal topics:

1. ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

2. TREES & SHRUBS

3. PLACE & MAPMAKING

4. CYCLES

We offer these prompt suggestions for each topic through a winter lens.

I. ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS:

- Observe _____ and record what you notice through words, pictures, and numbers — but use more of whichever you are most comfortable with.
- Draw, describe, and label your drawing of the animal you are watching. Some common winter animals to observe are squirrels and birds.
- Observe the features and behaviors of an animal near you. List, draw, and ask a question about what you think this animal is doing to help it survive the winter.
- How might the structure you noticed on the animal help it survive the cold winter?
- Going further, time how long the animal exhibits a behavior.
- Estimate the size of the animal.
- Use crayons or colored pencils to make smudges of the colors of the day or the animal you are observing on the winter day.
- Imagine you are a chipmunk asleep in a burrow underground. Draw what you think this underground world looks like.
- Describe the weather right now. Wind? Wind speed? Temperature in degrees? Temperature related to how to dress for comfort? Amount of clouds? Description of clouds? How might the animal activity be affected by today's weather?
- After witnessing an interesting event in the natural world, especially one involving animal behavior or interactions, you can create a “comic strip” to capture this observation.

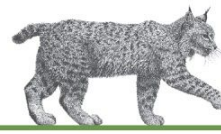
First, jot down notes describing the event immediately after seeing it when it is fresh in your mind. Draw a series of panels in your journal with images to show the steps of the event occurring over time. You can also include words and visual elements like arrows or different perspectives to show how the action took place. Be creative but try to be accurate in capturing what you observed!



2. TREES & SHRUBS:

- Observe _____ and record what you notice through words, pictures and numbers — but use more of whichever you are most comfortable with.
- Use crayons or colored pencils to show the colors you see on this tree or shrub.
- Explore your tree through touch, sound, smell, and sight. Describe and draw the textures you notice. What does the texture remind you of?
- Focus on one part of this tree or shrub. Draw, describe and wonder. How might the shape and texture of this plant part help it survive? Why do you think it is like that?
- Find 2 twigs to look at. Compare them. How are they alike and different?
- Use a hand lens to explore a twig close up. Record your discoveries on your journal page.
- How might the structure you noticed on the _____ tree help it survive?
- Draw and describe your twig. Trade your journal page with someone and see if they can find your twig based on the information on your journal page.
- Look at a twig close up. Find 3 things to count on your twig. Label and record what you count.
- Describe the weather right now. Wind? Wind speed? Temperature in degrees? Temperature related to how to dress for comfort? Amount of clouds? Description of clouds?
- How might the tree or shrub you are observing be affected by today's weather?
- Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote, "To appreciate the beauty of a snowflake, it is necessary to stand out in the cold." Stand quietly outside for a few moments and notice the beauty around you. You might see beauty in a small snowflake or in a giant tree, or you might hear a beautiful sound of winter. Write or draw about your experience.
- "I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says, 'Go to sleep, darlings, 'til the summer comes again.' " ~ Lewis Carroll. Observe something in nature that is covered with snow. Imagine that you are that object. What was it like as you began to become covered with snow? What does it feel like to be covered up "snug . . . with a white quilt" for the winter? Write about this experience.

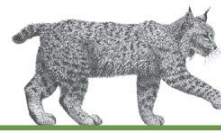
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3. PLACE & MAPMAKING:

- Observe the (stream or, forest, edge, sidewalk, crack, ridge, garden) and record what you notice through words, pictures, and numbers — but use more of whichever you are most comfortable with.
- Use a 3-foot piece of yarn or a hula hoop to make a circle at your Sit Spot. Look carefully at everything inside that circle. Make a map of what you see inside your circle.
- Create a chart to record the type of organisms you find in your circle (include a description or drawing if you don't know the species), and tally how many individuals you find of each species.
- Imagine you are as tall as your thumb. Explore the world of your circle as a little being. It might help to break a stick to be the little being as tall as your thumb. Now explore the world in your circle with or without a hand lens. What did your little being discover while exploring?
- Create a series of tunnels, roads, or a small village in the snow for a little being as tall as your thumb. Make a map of this place.
- We will visit (the swamp, this place) through the seasons. Make a map of it from (the trail) and label some landmarks. How might it be different in the springtime?
- Going further: Orient your map to a compass. Label North, East, South, and West on your map.
- Use crayons or colored pencils to make smudges of the colors of this place today.
- Look for evidence that now it is winter. Draw, describe, and use numbers to tell what you see.
- Look for evidence that winter is almost over. Draw, describe, and use numbers to tell what you see.
- Make marks on your page to represent the sounds you hear. Circle the ones that are from nature. Which ones make you think of winter?
- Complete a biodiversity inventory of a nearby nature spot, including trees, shrubs, small plants, fungi, birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, and other invertebrates. You can use field guides to try and identify the different species you observed.
- Consider doing biodiversity inventories in two or more different habitats and comparing the species you found. Can you come up with hypotheses to explain the differences and similarities based on the habitat conditions?
- Sign up with the app/website iNaturalist to submit your biodiversity data online, as well as receive help in identifying species. Their free app SEEK can also be used to help identify different species of plants, animals and fungi.

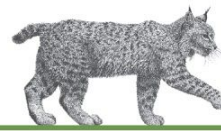
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4. CYCLES:

- Observe _____ and record what you notice through words, pictures and numbers — but use more of whichever you are most comfortable with (ice forming, snow drifts, snow or ice melting).
- Use crayons or colored pencils to make smudges showing the colors of the cycle.
- Make a drawing that shows the seasonal changes of the tree you are exploring today.
- What do you think this tree will look like in the spring? Draw and label your prediction.
- Follow the changes you observe over the course of days, weeks or months. How does the tree's appearance change? Keep track of the date, time and weather conditions during each observation session.
- Describe the weather right now. Wind description? Wind speed? Wind direction? Temperature in degrees? Temperature related to how to dress for comfort? Amount of clouds? Description of clouds? How might the cycle you are observing be affected by today's weather?
- Writer Hal Borland, wrote "No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn." What changes signal to you that winter is coming to an end? What are some signs that spring is arriving? Write about or draw the changes that you observe.
- I notice . . . I wonder . . . This reminds me of . . .

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Debriefing After Solo Journaling

After nature journaling, give students time to turn and talk about your debrief questions with a partner. Then hold a group discussion.

- What did you discover today that you had never noticed before?
- What journaling techniques did you use today?
- Learning new things is challenging. When you learn new journaling techniques, you grow your brain. What was challenging today? How did you handle that?
- Did you try a technique that is different from what you usually do?
- What new ideas can you learn from looking at other people's journals?

Possible Themes for Creating Your Own Nature Journal Prompt

- Mapmaking
- Exploring through touch, sound, smell, sight
- Colors of . . . the day, the place, the object of study
- Drawing, describing, and labeling a part of nature to study
- Observing an animal's features and behavior
- Observing changes in a plant over several days, weeks, or months
- Observing something close up with magnification
- Making comparisons
- Responding to a writer's words through writing or drawing
- Exploring a familiar place as if you are as tall as your thumb
- Weather observations: Wind? Wind speed? Temperature in degrees? Temperature related to how to dress for comfort? Amount of clouds? Description of clouds? How might the focus of the day be affected by today's weather?
- Experiment with an interesting page layout (dividing the page in half for comparing; a close up through a hand lens and a distant view; showing exact size; using arrows or labels to connect words to the drawing . . .)