

Covid-19 helps us appreciate how lucky we are in New Hampshire to have easy access to nature, where we can breathe fresh air and have plenty of physical distance between us. As schools reopen, the Harris Center faculty is excited to offer nature journaling resources to support building literacy skills and personal connections to nature outside your school and students' homes. This set of resources blends what we've been doing for decades with new insights from John Muir Laws and Emilie Lygren's 2020 book, *How to Teach Nature Journaling*.

The Goal of Keeping a Nature Journal

The goal is to see clearly, to accurately observe and record observations without regard to whether it "looks good." A nature journal is not an art project. Drawing improves observational skills. The attention required to draw locks a moment into memory. Using drawing and writing together use different parts of the brain and are even better for memory when used together. For nature journaling to work its observational magic, students must understand that the goal of their drawing is to observe and record data.

It is very powerful for a teacher to share their own nature journal page with the class and tell a story about their experience outside looking closely. This invites children to:

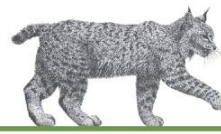
- Learn more about their teacher
- See an adult modeling an activity that can be a lifelong project
- See our *Nature Journaling Introduction* slideshow pdf as a way to introduce journaling to your class.

Make Simple Journals

Here are some ideas. More styles are included in the *Nature Journaling Resources & Equipment* document. Bound composition books with front covers decorated by students. You might use nature calendars or magazines. You might copy black and white line drawings of local natural history images and have students color them.

You might have students create their own art using cut paper collage and then laminate them and adhere them to the cardboard cover.

1. Or, make a journal using cardboard or chipboard for covers, blank paper and metal rings to fasten the layers together after punching holes.
2. Or, you might use clipboards and loose pages outside that get stored in Nature Journal dedicated folders when indoors.



Practice Using the Journal Indoors

Practice using the journal indoors with a natural object chosen by the teacher from outside (a leaf, a stone, an acorn, a seed pod). Use a prompt like this, which can be used over and over again.

- I noticed...
- I wonder...
- This reminds me...

Debrief

After nature journaling, give students time to turn and talk about each of 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?

Make and Practice Using Sit Upons

It's useful to practice using them inside before taking them outside. Sit Upons are a dry, insulated seat for sitting on the ground. They also help us define the spot where one is sitting.

Here are some designs:

1. Cut a piece of "Ensolite" camping pad closed-cell foam into 912" pieces, each piece becomes a Sit Upon.
2. Get 2-gallon freezer bags. Have students fold newspaper to fit inside the bag as insulation. Put a piece of art as the top layer and tape the layers of paper together. Seal the bag.

It helps to practice using them inside with journals to become familiar with the physical distance between each person.

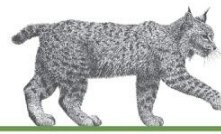
On Your First Expedition Outside

When you take your nature journals outside for the first time, establish a focus that will be productive for your class curriculum such as pollinators, or leaves, or bird activity. Set out physical boundaries so students know where to find their "Sit Spot." Introduce the theme and have students organize their page with date, location, and weather. Their entry should include the prompt you practiced indoors.

I notice ...

I wonder...

It reminds me of ...



Debrief After Each Nature Journal Session

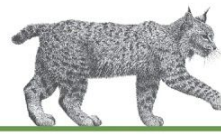
Debrief by giving students time to turn and talk with a classmate before holding a whole group discussion with debriefing questions like this:

- 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?
- What new ideas can you learn from looking at people's journals?

If Students Are Discouraged About Their Drawing

If students get discouraged, say something like, "Just like you, I'm learning how to do this. Look at how much (I, you) have improved in the last month. Look at what (I, you) discovered while making this stretch. As long as we keep drawing, improvement never stops." Some students find that note taking to explain something on their journal page takes the pressure off of drawing.

- Motivate students by giving specific, positive feedback.
- Remind them that observational drawing can be easier than drawing from imagination.
- Have them flip back to older journal entries so they can see their progress.
- Combine writing and drawing.
- Teach "drawing as seeing" exercises on the following page.



Try some drawing exercises to loosen up and focus on seeing what is really there, not what you imagine something looks like.

- **Memory drawing.** First look carefully and touch and smell your nature treasure. Write down 2 words that describe it. Then place it behind your back. Take 1 minute to draw what you remember. After 1 minute look at your object again. Is there anything else you notice now about your object?
- **Paper plate blind contour.** Put your pencil through the center of a paper plate so that you cannot see your drawing. Then start a blind contour drawing.
- **Blind contour drawing.** Look at the outer edge of your nature treasure. Keep your eyes on the object. Choose a place to start your drawing, moving your pencil continuously, without lifting it off the paper. Let your eyes really see the outer edge of your object and let your eyes tell your pencil where to go. Train your hand to follow your eyes. Take about 2-3 minutes to work your way around and along the outer edges and inner creases of .
- **Half blind contour drawing.** With the same object, start another blind contour drawing in which your pencil is never lifted off the paper. This time you may look at your paper to check in, while your pencil stays on the paper where you stopped. Then continue looking at the object and drawing.
- **Quick gesture drawing.** Hold your pencil loosely, further from the point than usual. Lightly and loosely draw lots of pale lines to capture the shape of the object. Let your brain sort the lines, add more, and then darken the ones that seem most accurate. Then you can erase the extra lines.