



Nature Journals on the Playground and In the Garden

Teacher Resource



Time to complete: 50 minutes.

Subsequent lessons: 10-30 minutes

Content Area: Science, ELA

SC Standards K-5th grade.

K-11.1 Engage in daily opportunities for play and exploration to foster a sense of curiosity, develop the disposition of inquisitiveness, and begin to verbally articulate "I wonder" about ideas of interest.

1-11.1 Translate "wonderings" into questions that lead to group conversations, explorations, and investigations.

Grade Level PreK-5



2-12.1 Ask self-generated questions that lead to group conversations, explorations, and investigations.

3-LS4-3. Construct an argument with evidence that in a particular habitat some organisms can thrive, struggle to survive, or fail to survive.

4-11.1 Formulate questions to focus thinking on an idea to narrow and direct further inquiry.

5-ESS1-2. Represent data in graphical displays to reveal patterns of daily changes in length and direction of shadows, day and night, and the seasonal appearance of some stars in the night sky.

Background:

Journaling is a powerful tool that unlocks creativity and curiosity. Nature journaling helps build observation skills and data collection. Journaling teaches and reinforces the importance of record-keeping while integrating science, writing, art, math, and more into a fun activity for students. Activities can be done at school and continued at home in their own gardens and neighborhoods.

Nature journaling is a great tool for environmental education because it leads students to make observations and record them. If used consistently, it can provide a record of how students change over time.

Field Trip Tie-In

An excellent accompaniment to this lesson would be a field trip to Brookgreen Gardens. Nature Journals are a fantastic way to document learning on your field trip and record your observations in the gardens, zoo, or sensory trail.

Sensing Nature is a great field trip where students take a walk along the Children's Nature and Sensory Trail and use touch, sight, hearing, and smell to experience nature. They will discuss living and non-living things they see and make comparisons. Children will have the opportunity to explore the trail and use their senses at diverse fun-filled stations. Students may use their journals to document their findings.

Materials:

Notebook or blank journal

Journal pages (attached)

Pencils

Colored pencils or crayons

Chart paper

Optional:

Magnifying glasses

Binoculars

Objectives:

Students will make connections with the natural world.

Students will document their observations through writing and drawing.

Students will learn how to look for signs of animals living on their playground, school garden or Brookgreen Gardens.

Vocabulary:

Nature Journal- the practice of drawing or writing in response to nature.

Observation- the action of watching or examining something or someone carefully to gain information.

Safari- an expedition to observe animals in their natural habitat.

Habitat- the natural home or environment of an animal or plant.

Native- belonging to a particular place based on birth.

Phenology journal is an account of seasonal changes that affect plants and animals in a location, and the biological effects of those changes. This can be an on-going journal to document life on the playground or in the school garden.

Procedures:

1. Begin by asking students if they have ever heard of a safari. A safari does not have to be in places far away but can be on the playground or in their backyard. Ask students “What plants and animals have you observed on the playground or school garden.” An observation is watching or examining something or someone carefully to gain information. Write or draw student answers on chart paper to illustrate their responses.

2. Tell students they are going on a safari around the school grounds and playground to find what plants and native animals are living or have visited there. Ask students for ideas where they may look to find animals, animal homes, and tracks. After students have time to explore the designated area, instruct them to find a spot to record their findings in their new journal.

4. Show students the expectation of their journaling. You can use the reproducible page, as an example. Decide what requirements you expect with each entry such as date, location, and weather. Remember to let students know their observations and journal can differ from others. There is no “perfect” way to journal.

5. Begin your safari with students by explaining observations should be more than just what they see, but with most all their other senses. Encourage them to feel different barks on the trees as you move outside. Ask students to share about what wildlife they hear, if any plants have a smell, what colors they observe. As you move, allow students to share what they observe with each other.

6. Once on the playground or garden, distribute journals and pencils.

7. Allow students to explore with their journal and document their observations of animals living on the playground or in the garden. Based on grade level, student requirements should differ. Each student should include the following: sketch(es) of their observations of the environment, written response such as labeling of animal or plant, and feelings about the natural world. Older students may use descriptive and reflective responses.

8. Walk around to encourage students’ exploration, keep them on task, and point out some things that you notice.

9. Gather in a circle to guide a small group discussion. Ask “What animals did you see? What animal habitats did you find? Explain that native animals have been here since birth. Ask more questions to lead discussion.

“What native animals did you hear?”

“Are there any plants that provide food for native animals?”

“Can you find animal habitats such as webs, nests, or fallen logs?”

10. Allow students to gather in small groups to discuss their findings. Ask students to share using sentence starters like:

“I observed...”

“I wonder....”

“I want to know more about...”

11. Allow students to then explore for 5 more minutes to observe what their friends noticed that they may have missed, or to finish their own journal entry.

12. Gather back together and ask students to share something they want to learn more about.

13. Use journal findings to guide learning about animals, plants, weather patterns, and more. Follow up with information about the plants, animals, or information they want to research more about. Maybe visit the school library so all students can find a book about what they found curious.

Design time in your daily or weekly schedule to make journaling a part of your curriculum.

Collect journals to apply rubric as desired.

Five Days of Journaling and Focus

Questions

Day 1: Draw a picture of the environment.

What kinds of living things could live here?

Day 2: Draw or write about one plant in your environment. Why is this plant growing

here? How are its’ needs met in the environment?

Day 3: Look around and find an insect, spider, or bird. Draw an animal you observe. What is it doing in its environment? What do you notice about its body?

Day 4: What is the weather in this environment like today? Can you draw the weather today? (Draw the environment during a different season later and discuss how weather/seasons influence animals and plants.)

Day 5: Find a spot to sit and observe your surroundings. Record your observations using your different senses. What do you hear, smell, feel, and see? (Taste if appropriate)

Extension Activities:

1. Plant identification with drawings or leaf and bark rubbings.
2. Observe animals and discuss animal classification.
3. Draft a poem about your safari or something that inspires you in nature.
4. Start seeds and document plant life cycle.
5. Bring in natural objects and encourage sketching using a variety of materials.
6. Use all your senses to describe something from the garden (fruit or vegetable).

Additional Resource:

Request a free copy of “Opening the World through Journaling: Integrating art, science, and language arts” Curriculum through the California Native Plant Society at

<https://www.cnps.org/education/students/parents-teachers/nature-journaling-curriculum-request> .

Exploring Nature Activity Book for Kids: 50 Creative Projects to Spark Curiosity in the Outdoors by Kim Andrews

The Big Book of Nature Art by Yuval Zommer

I Went Walking by Sue Williams

Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert

Assessment

Journal Rubric

Scale from 1-3	3	2	1
Student’s document includes date, location, and weather in their journal entry.	Student includes date, location, and weather.	Student includes two out of three: date, location, and weather.	Student includes one or none of the three: date, location, weather.
Student’s journal entry includes a sketch that relates to the day’s topic.	Student’s sketch is related to the day’s topic and answers the focus question.	Student’s sketch is not related to the day’s topic.	Student does not include a sketch.
Student’s journal entry uses text to describe, label, or explain student’s sketch.	Student writes to describe, label, or explain their sketch and answers the day’s focus question.	Student writes in their journal but it does not relate to their sketch or answer the focus question.	Students do not include writing in their journal.
Total	7-9 Meets Expectations	4-6 Needs Improvement	1-3 Does not meet expectations