

FIELD JOURNALING WITH STUDENTS

“Journaling is the single most powerful tool to supercharge your observation, memory, and connection with nature. It is the critical foundational habit of being a naturalist and scientist.” – John Muir Laws

Remember: See free journaling activities and tips in *Opening The World Through Nature Journaling*: www.johnmuirlaws.com

Benefits to field journaling:

Building an emotional connection to nature. As students engage in focused study and record observations in their journals, they build a connection to that aspect of the natural world. This process will lead to a memory of that place and of the student’s experience—one the student carries in their mind, and in the pages of their journal.

Connections to standards: By engaging in field journaling, students are practicing disciplinary literacy in science. They are learning how scientists write and communicate. By creating accurate, detailed field journal entries, they are creating science text, using both illustrations and academic language.

Naturalists and scientists:

- **Have different goals when they approach making a journal entry.** They might choose to focus on recording information about where an organism is found, writing down thoughts/ideas, recording data, capturing a moment, doing biodiversity inventories, etc.
- **Use different strategies to record information.** These might include: labeled drawings, text, measurements, questions, tentative answers based upon further observation, arrows, magnified view circle, charts, etc.

Field Journaling:

- **Focuses on observations before art.** It’s not about pretty pictures, it’s about accurate observations and the thinking that happens in the process of journaling.
- **Uses writing and drawing to record information.** Scientific drawings often include labels and accompanying descriptions in writing.

Instructors who use journals successfully to support science instruction suggest:

- **Pay attention to group and individual needs.** There are great times for journaling, and there are...less great times for journaling. If students are super energetic, have just gotten off the bus, or are very hungry, they won’t be able to focus on journaling as much. Weather conditions, like very cold or windy conditions, or extreme heat, can also provide challenges. Set your students up for success in journaling by choosing a time and location for it where they will have the best possible chance of being engaged.
- **Offer structure and scaffolding.** To engage students in journaling, offer them a focused learning experience and some direction for how to record information in their journals—much like a naturalist or scientist.
- **Match scaffolding with learning goals.** The types of observations and thinking students do while journaling will vary based on the kind of scaffolding you offer. Think ahead of time about what part of nature students will focus on, kind of prompt will lead them to make observations and engage in thinking relevant to your learning goals.
- **Give appropriate and supportive feedback.** Avoid the tendency to comment on the artistic quality of drawings. Instead, give feedback on what you are asking students to do—to make accurate observations and record them in drawing and writing. Be non-judgmental as you point out observations students made or methods they used to show thinking on the page.
- **Give students adequate materials for journaling.** Make sure students have at least some blank pages on which to record their observations and experiences.