

Using a Journal Year Round



Having your students keep a nature journal throughout the entire year is a great way to help them connect more with the outside world and gain a better understanding about nature. It can be a peaceful activity that may bring a sense of joy and wonderment to the science curriculum.¹ Nature journals can be used in a variety of ways – both for every day use or tailored to the specific needs of unit or lesson plans. Nature journals can be used as a stand-alone activity or they can be used as the main book that your class uses to document their learning in Science throughout the year. This document will provide an overview for general uses of the nature journal, as well as ways in which it can be utilized for each of the four curriculum organizers in the British Columbia Science curriculum.

Nature journals usually take the form of a notebook – this can be purchased or made by folding and attaching paper together. Unlined paper is recommended as there is usually quite a bit of drawing involved. For younger students, it may be best to provide them with lined paper that can be glued in during writing activities. Try to provide children with a variety of materials to use. This includes but is not limited to pencils, pens, crayons, pencil crayons, markers, highlighters, rulers, glue, scissors, paper clips, tape, sticky notes, magnifying glasses, cameras, and plastic bags.



¹ Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth. "Keeping a Nature Journal – Discover a Whole New Way of Seeing the World Around You." (Hong Kong: Storey Publishing, 2000), 9.

What Does a Nature Journal Look Like?

- There is really no set definition of what journal pages should look like – this is up to you and your students! Generally pages include a mixture of drawing and writing, though this can be modified to suit individual or project needs. Some examples of page format include:
 - Labeled diagrams.
 - Drawings of a specimen from multiple angles and magnifications.
 - Rubbings of tree bark or other hard substances.
 - Graphs to represent data.
 - Webs or mind maps.
 - Write ups – this could take the form of paragraphs, lists, poems, or point form notes.
 - Collages of photographs, drawings, notes, and/or newspaper articles.
 - Word studies – writing down a word on the page (such as *dark* or *pointy*) and drawing, describing, or finding images of organisms that represent it.
 - Wonder pages – keep a page dedicated to writing out any questions that they have about the world.
 - Colour explorations – for example, comparing the different colours of green in plants to crayon colours or paint chip colours.
- You may wish to provide your students with choice in the type of format they use for their journal. However, depending on the lesson you are teaching you may wish to ask them to adhere to a certain format or include certain features.

General Use of the Nature Journal:

- You may wish to provide a basic structure for journal entries. This could take the form of having children first write out some basic observations and information – the date, the time, the weather and temperature, and the location.² Ask them to represent things that they hear and smell, whether it is through a list or through images.
- After they have a basic sense of the moment, you may wish to encourage them to draw their attention to a specific area – this could be the looking down towards the ground, observing at eye-level, looking up overhead, or taking in the entire area around them at once.³ Encourage them to get very close to objects on the ground and study them from different angles.

Processes of Science:

- The Processes of Science category includes the skills that students learn, including observing, classifying, inferring, hypothesising, decision making, and critical thinking.
- Through the use of a journal, children will explore the development of these skills by making practical observations and notes about the world they see around them. Journals provide a meaningful context for them to develop these core skills that they will need throughout their education.

² Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth. "Keeping a Nature Journal – Discover a Whole New Way of Seeing the World Around You." (Hong Kong: Storey Publishing, 2000), 22-23.

³ Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth. "Keeping a Nature Journal – Discover a Whole New Way of Seeing the World Around You." (Hong Kong: Storey Publishing, 2000), 23-24.

Life Science:

- The Life Sciences include the study of organisms and the way that they interact with their environment.
- Children in all grade levels can use their journals to tape in plant specimens, draw diagrams of organisms, track and record data for changes in plants (whether it be outside or inside the classroom), and collect information about the diversity of life that exists in their neighbourhood.

Physical Science:

- The Physical Science category includes the study of the interactions between matter and energy.
- Topics in this category typically involve experiments as a way of exploring the different concepts. Students can use their journals as a way to record sketches of the experimental materials, hypotheses, observational notes, and more. Providing students with time to complete a journal page for each experiment that they do can allow them to represent their learning in a way that is meaningful to them.



Photo: Artiom Shostak, Beaty Biodiversity Museum

Earth and Space Science:

- The Earth and Space Sciences involve studying the structure of Earth and the universe.
- Students can track seasonal changes involving the weather, sun, and conditions on Earth by keeping a section in their journals for each season. Regular outdoor excursions can help students experience what exactly is happening on our planet during each season. Recording data about the senses,
- Students in Grade 3 may also wish to have a night sky journal where they can track the phases of the moon, the constellations, and any planets that they are able to see during the evening. This activity is recommended to occur during the winter months, since it will be darker earlier in the evening.