

Tips and Suggestions for starting Nature Journaling with K-5 Students

This is how I start:

I start the first few times inside the classroom so they can see how I want them to record their observations in their nature journal.

Day 1, Introduction Part 1, Sketching Your Object

1. I tell students we are going to start nature journaling. I tell them we're going to 'think like a scientist'. I show them images of what a nature journal page might look like. We watch [The Nature Journal Connection, Episode 1](#) (I also post the video on our class page).
2. We go outside, find a leaf, and bring it back into the classroom. I get one as well and grab a few extras in case someone didn't pick one up.
3. Students get out: journal, colored pencils, crayons, pencils.
 - a. We will add more materials as we go. Older students might start with rulers and magnifying lenses too.
4. I start by modeling how to sketch my leaf. I have to be very explicit that we are making a scientific drawing to draw the leaf as it looks and not drawing a picture. I use a document camera, showing students, and pointing out specifics as we go: "The leaf has a jagged edge, so I'm sketching a jagged edge. The leaf has 9 red spots, so I'm sketching 9 red spots as close to the actual spot as I can".
 - a. Students start. I keep making my own sketch so they can see what I'm doing and I 'think aloud' as I go.
 - b. We usually do only a sketch the first day. This might take 45 minutes. To me, that seems like enough for the first day for K-2. For grades 3-5, you might want to introduce WIN (Words, Illustrations, Numbers) 1 and 2.

Day 2, Introduction, Part 2, I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me Of

1. I show students [The Nature Journal Connection, Episode 2](#), which introduces I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds me of. I also post this video on our class page.
2. We go outside, find another natural object from outside, and bring it inside.
3. Practice what we saw in the video
 - a. We practice saying out loud all the things we notice for one

minute. Then we spend another minute saying out loud all the things we wonder, and then spend a 3rd minute saying out loud what it reminds me of. We do it just like the video shows us how to do and I model it first.

- b. I usually have to give students examples of 'reminds me of' so they don't say their leaf reminds them of a leaf. We spend a little time on this because they tend to want to identify their leaf, rather than have it 'remind' them of something else or a memory.
4. Then, under a document camera, I model writing the I notice..., I wonder..., It reminds me.... of sentence starters. I give them the sentence starters to copy and they finish. I tell them to write down something they just said out loud.
5. We sketch our objects as well. I am sketching my own object under the document camera showing them the process again. Then I walk around and check on their progress, prompting and encouraging them to include Words, Numbers, and Pictures.
6. I often need to remind students we're not trying to draw a picture, but rather a realistic (scientific!) sketch of our object.

Beyond the First Two Days:

- With younger students I do Nature Journaling inside a few more times so they know what they are expected to do when we go outside.
- Students get out their materials and then we go outside to look for some natural object we can bring inside. Once inside with our object, we practice saying out loud: IN, IW, IR (just like video #2 shows).
- Around this third time I pass out the magnifying glasses. I explicitly talk about WIN (Words, Illustrations, and Numbers) and different ways to include these elements.
- Then we just practice nature journaling. I continue to model the process with my own example. I show students how to label the pictures and explain that words don't have to be sentences. I walk around and prompt students to use WIN. I show examples of student work under the document camera pointing out different attributes. I write the sentence starters for students: I Notice____, I Wonder____, It reminds me of____. I also put these sentence starters on chart paper and post it on the wall.

- After a few times like this, and students have the hang of what we're doing, I start showing my students more John Muir Laws' The Nature Journal Connection YouTube Videos. (This might go slower for K-2 and faster for 3-5).
- I introduce Video #4 - Zoom In/Zoom Out. My students love Zoom In/Zoom Out.
- I show students how to use a ruler and record the length of their sketch.

Once everyone has the hang of it, we go outside!

- Before we go outside, I have students write, "I notice..., I wonder..., It reminds me of.." in their journal. They bring their supplies: journal, pencils, colored pencils, erasers, magnifying lens, and a ruler.
- We walk around the school yard and find an area with plenty of natural items for kids to spread out, but not too far.
- I let them work in small group clusters so they can work together. I have them stay in one spot. Once inside we do a gallery walk so we can see each other's journal. I point out certain attributes under the document camera.

Please feel free to contact me with questions or share how it's going!

Andrea Ames

aames@lodiUSD.net