

## NATURE JOURNALING GUIDELINES\*

Recording the natural world and our place in it through drawing has been a human passion since the first artists etched and painted their observations on cave walls thousands of years ago. With your nature journal, you are joining scores of scientists who have documented their observations, questions, and experiences in sketchbooks and notebooks. Before drawing, focus for a moment. Remember that you are keeping the journal to learn to observe, record, and fully appreciate nature and the place in which you live. You are becoming more aware of where you live and how you might share this awareness with others.

**I. BASIC INFORMATION** For each entry weekly, record all of the following for that day in the upper portion of your page.

1. **Date.** This establishes the season and month in relation to the year.
2. **Place.** Where exactly are you? Your backyard, a park, the school?
3. **Time.** This is either accurate clock time (9:32 a.m.) or simply early afternoon or late afternoon. Plants and animals respond to varying light conditions, so time of day matters.
4. **Weather.** Weather conditions affect the activity of most living things. Therefore, include the **temperature** and **precipitation**, if any, or **humidity**, or **barometric pressure** if not.
5. **Moon phase** and time of **moon rise** and **moon set**.
6. **Sun rise** and **sun set**. Recording this data (#5 & 6) helps keep you aware of monthly and annual astronomical cycles.
7. **Wind direction** and **speed**. Locate and draw the points of the compass and add direction and speed.
8. **Cloud patterns** and **cloud cover**. Cloud patterns can be identified by name; cloud cover is the % of sky covered. Both can be recorded by drawing a small box and adding an illustration of the type of clouds and the kind of sky you see. Put the moon in if you see it.
9. **Pagination.** Number each page of your nature journal in the top middle of the page or upper outside corner. Be consistent. Numbering helps you to order your entries and to refer or find specific entries more easily.

### II. Observe:

1. **Become still.** Take a few moments to orient. Close your eyes. Sniff the air. Listen. Use all of your senses, not just your eyes, to gather information.
2. **Ground Observations.** Look around at the ground. Crouch or kneel down to get close to individual objects. Observe detail.
3. **Eye-Level Observations.** Standing up so you are free to move around, turn in a circle and then notice what comes into view at eye level--leaves, tall plants, shrubs,

low nests, birds, insects on surfaces. 4. **Overhead Observations.** Look up. Crane your neck. Turn slowly in a circle while looking up.

**III. BEGIN DRAWING:** The drawn portion of your nature journal should incorporate elements from all of those listed below. Each does not have to be a separate drawing, but can contribute together to a whole drawing of your place or a specific part of it.

1. **Draw:** Try to draw everything actual size or to a given scale. Label each item with its name, if you know what it is. Give size measurements (estimate). Show the object and what it's doing or is part of. Choose a tree to draw. Illustrate any objects. Draw the clouds, sun, and moon.
2. **Color.** Use color to enhance your drawings. Replicating color increases your sensitivity to observation and application of detail. Record sky colors.
3. **IV. Write** Tell the story of this place at this time so that others may come to know it as well. Elaborate your sense of place.
4. **Label.** Name the object/event you are drawing so that you can identify it later. If you are unsure what it is, write your best guess of what it might be. If it is completely new to you, put a question mark. Name all of the parts of the object you are drawing. State the color of each or use your colored pencils/markers to put in a slash of color and fill in later.
5. **Narrate.** Take time to describe the entire area, object, or event you are observing. List objects, plants, animals, and or events you are witnessing. Include movement, sound, and behavior characteristics. Note what is unusual, surprising, informative, similar to something else, etc. For further learning, write down a question about each object. For example, you might ask: How did it get here? How long ago? Where does it go in winter? Can it also be found in other habitats? This is the heart of your nature journal.
6. **Summarize.** Back in the classroom or at home, reflect on your observations, drawings, questions, experiences, and expectations. Write what you think, believe, and wonder. Ask questions. Tell a story. Make connections. Include detail. Use vivid verbs and descriptors. Let your personal voice ring out in your writing.

\* adapted from: Walker, Clare L. and Charles E. Roth. Nature Journaling: Learning to Observe and Connect with the World Around You. Pownal, Vermont: Storey Books, 1998.