Roots of Curiosity: Nature Journaling

Amber Smith, Rachelle Johnson
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Time Frame 45 minutes

Essential Question(s)

- How does nature journaling deepen observation, curiosity, and scientific thinking?

Summary

This educator resource is designed to help teachers use nature journaling as a tool to strengthen students' observation skills, reflection, and connection to the environment. Grounded in research showing that outdoor learning enhances engagement, collaboration, and well-being (Mann et al., 2022), the resource follows a clear, three-part structure: an introduction, nature journaling, and reflection and connection. In the "Introduction" portion, teachers choose a nature journaling prompt aligned with their learning goals. The "Nature Journaling" section invites students to venture outdoors to observe, sketch, and write about their experiences. Finally, the "Reflection and Connection" section guides students to process their observations, express their feelings about the experience, and link their insights to science content or broader learning themes.

Learning Goals

Attachments

- 3-2-1—Roots of Curiosity - Spanish.docx
- 3-2-1—Roots of Curiosity - Spanish.pdf
- 3-2-1—Roots of Curiosity.docx
- 3-2-1—Roots of Curiosity.pdf
- Activity Slides—Roots of Curiosity.pptx
- Nature Journaling Prompts—Roots of Curiosity - Spanish.docx
- Nature Journaling Prompts—Roots of Curiosity - Spanish.pdf
- Nature Journaling Prompts—Roots of Curiosity.docx
- Nature Journaling Prompts—Roots of Curiosity.pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- Nature Journaling Prompts handout (attached; optional; one copy per seven students)
- 3-2-1 handout (attached; one half sheet per student)
- Journal or paper
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers

5 minutes

Introduction

Use the attached **Activity Slides** to guide the activity. Use slide 2 to introduce the lesson. Move through **slides 3–4** and go over the essential question and learning objectives.

Transition to **slide 5** and share the definition of *nature journaling*. Explain to students that they should use the nature journal to develop their observation and thinking skills. Share that their drawings don't need to be perfect, but their drawings should be understandable.

35 minutes

Nature Journaling

Teacher's Note: Prompt Preparation

This portion of the lesson has students respond to one of many journaling prompts present in both the Activity Slides and **Nature Journaling Prompts** handout. You may give all students one prompt to complete, assign students different prompts, or have students choose their own prompt.

If providing students with different prompts or allowing them to choose, cut up the Nature Journaling Prompts handout and distribute the individual prompts to students. Have them read their prompts carefully and encourage them to ask questions prior to going outside.

The slides that correspond with each individual prompt are listed below. You may choose to hide slides depending on which prompts you want students to use.

Display slide 6 and share how students should respond to the given prompt(s) in their nature journal. Then, display the corresponding slides for the prompts assigned to students to offer directions and examples. The journaling prompts are as follows:

- Zoom In, Zoom Out: **slides 7–8**
- Mapping: **slides 9–10**
- Soundscapes: **slides 11–12**
- Questioning Questions: **slides 13–14**
- Hidden Numbers: **slides 15–16**
- Timeline: **slides 17–18**
- Animal Encounters: **slides 19–20**

5 minutes

Reflection and Connection

Transition to **slide 21** and give each student one of the **3-2-1** handouts. Introduce the 3-2-1 instructional strategy to students. Have students reflect on their nature journaling session by recording three interesting observations, two questions, and one connection to classroom content on their handouts. Invite students to share what they wrote with the class.

Research Rationale

Nature journaling can enrich students' learning by promoting observation, curiosity, and reflection through outdoor experiences. Incorporating nature journaling into classroom practice helps students meaningfully engage with their environment while supporting well-being and academic growth. Research shows that learning in natural settings enhances engagement, collaboration, and self-concept and can even yield academic benefits (Mann et al., 2022).

Mann et al. (2022) also found that time spent in nature is increasingly limited for children, despite evidence that outdoor learning provides measurable socio-emotional and cognitive advantages. They recommend that educators intentionally integrate nature-based experiences into the curriculum to nurture holistic development and environmental connection.

Grounded in these findings, this resource encourages teachers to guide students in closely observing and recording their surroundings through writing, sketching, and reflection. By moving learning beyond classroom walls, educators can create opportunities for students to develop ownership of their learning, deepen their appreciation of nature, and strengthen their sense of curiosity and well-being (Mann et al., 2022).

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). 3-2-1. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/117
- Mann, J., Gray, T., Truong, S., Brymer, E., Passy, R., Ho, S., Sahlberg, P., Ward, K., Bentsen, P., Curry, C., & Cowper, R. (2022). Getting out of the classroom and into nature: A systematic review of nature-specific outdoor learning on school Children's Learning and Development. *Frontiers in Public Health, 10*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.877058
- Muir Laws, J. (n.d.). *Nature journaling curriculum*. John Muir Laws. https://johnmuirlaws.com/journaling-curriculum/