

Nature Journaling for Kids



These lessons are just a small sample of what will be available in **Forces of Nature**, the Madison Audubon Environmental Education Handbook.

The Nature Journal (Lesson 13 in Forces of Nature)

20-40 min

Indoor/Outdoor, Calm

all ages

You'll need space to do a small art project .

Materials: Paper, stapler, coloring/writing supplies, possibly nature magazines/animal pictures, glue, scissors

Help kids create their own nature journals. You could provide them with a journal to decorate or have them start from scratch. Journals can be as simple as a few sheets of paper stabled together or you can delve into book binding (YouTube offers lots of great tutorials on this).

Have kids write their name on the front of the journal and decorate it. You might offer nature magazines or photos so that kids can collage on the front. Be creative!

Using the Journal (10-20 minutes):

Create a space during your lesson or day for journaling. This could be at the beginning or end of your lesson/day, or kids could take notes during the lesson/day. You might opt to give kids a prompt or let them free write or draw.

If you want more direction for journaling, check out the options below!

Variation:

1. 8 minute notes: have the kids divide their paper into 4 quadrants by making a large "+" on their paper. In the top left, have kids write something they saw, in the top right, something that happened, in the bottom left, write something someone said, and in the bottom right draw anything from that day. Spend two minutes on each portion. Focus on kids getting words on the paper. Depending on the age of the kids, don't worry about writing in full sentences or spelling. This helps you move through the journaling quickly, and it's an easy way to sneak it into another larger activity.
2. Have kids spend a set amount of time (2-10 minutes) recording something you suggest. Options include everything they hear or see, human activity, bird species, or squirrel behavior.
3. Find a natural object to draw. It could be a stick, leaf, pinecone, rock, or plant. Don't pick anything living, and be sure to return these things to the place you found them. Have kids draw the object, focusing more on making observations than on making beautiful art. Then, have kids finish the following sentences (these are awesome ideas from John Muir Laws):
 - a. I notice. . .
 - b. I wonder. . .
 - c. It reminds me of. . .

The Science Journal (Lesson 13a in Forces of Nature)

Put a scientist spin on the Nature Journal: have kids start each entry by including the date, time, location, and weather data. Encourage them to use descriptive words and detail while making their entries. You might focus their entry on a topic that you're studying, or have them include a diagram or scientific illustration. Include questions they have about the topic, things they wonder, and ideas they have.

Phenology Journal (Lesson 13b in Forces of Nature)

Another variation of the Science Journal. Phenology is the scientific study of how nature changes throughout the year. When kids make journal entries, have them focus on recording details about what is going on in their season. For example, don't just record that there are trees, but include whether there are leaves on the tree, how large the leaves are and what color they are. Making repeat visits to the same area and making observations about the same types of things (plants, birds, whether water is frozen) during each entry will help build a phonological record of the area.

Original Madison Audubon lessons, except for 8 minute notes, which Josie Guiney shared with Madison Audubon.

Sit Spots (Lesson 14 in Forces of Nature)

This activity pairs beautifully with Nature Journaling, so we've included it in this packet. Enjoy!

10-15 min

Outdoor, Calm

all ages

You'll need space to spread out, ideally in nature

Materials: Notepads, pencils (both optional- you can just sit and observe)

Have kids spread out in a natural space and find a place where they feel connected with nature. Outside is ideal, but you could also choose a window that offers a view of the sky or your neighborhood. Help kids along by suggesting finding a tree or a plant that they like or interests them.

Give them some time (2-10 minutes) to be in this space. If they are having trouble, you can lead them through a sensory inventory (what do you see? What do you feel? What do you hear? What do you smell?)

Return to this same sit spot daily, weekly, or monthly to help kids to feel connected to "their" place. This will also help kids notice small changes that happen between visits.

Incorporate a nature journal into this routine to deepen the experience! You can either have kids journal while they're in their sit spot, or journal after they're done observing.

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