

Nature Journaling for Ecological Restoration





Teacher's Guide



Introduction

A Saskatchewan-based nature journaling unit is a tool for building relationships with our local landscape. While there are many nature journaling resources available, the cold-climate conditions that persist in our home province through much of the academic year present a unique set of circumstances. It invites the question: How do we adapt?

A great place to begin is by taking cues from our wild neighbours. We may need a thicker coat, to build up a winter stash, and to wait out the harshest weather in our respective dens! Our human adaptations can add to the overall picture as we learn to relate to the world outside our door. Think of guidelines rather than rules. Be flexible. We can use technology, photos and apps alongside tools like art supplies and field guides, make gathering a part of our fall practice (see lesson *Gathering & Collecting*), and combine in-person experience with research and resources.

Most importantly, we can embrace the challenge of looking for nature, no matter where we are, or what the conditions. We (Leane and Merrissa) both live in rural parts of the Aspen Parklands in Saskatchewan, which will be reflected in these pages, but the ideas in this unit plan are meant to be flexible. Consider your own surroundings – what's outside *your* window? What grows outside *your* door? What is coming up through the cracks in the sidewalk, or standing above the snow line? Do you have a bird feeder, a local park, a great view of the sky, or a body of water you can visit and observe? While the forest or countryside may seem like obvious places to look for nature at first glance, our cities and towns are populated by a diversity of plants and urban wildlife. Your nature journal will help you to look again with fresh eyes at whatever surrounds you. In every case, there will be earth, sky, and weather; plants, birds, insects and other animals making a home there, or passing through.

I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me Of & Words, Pictures, Numbers

These two foundational approaches to nature journaling come from John Muir Laws and the Wild Wonder Foundation. The goals, strategies and activities in this unit grow from the practice of extending and integrating these ideas into how we comprehend, respond, compose, and create in partnership with the land we care for.

I Notice: what do I see, hear, smell, feel, or taste in this place?

I Wonder: what questions, ideas, and hypotheses arise?

It Reminds Me Of: what connections, contrasts, or comparisons can be drawn between this & similar experiences?

Words: use words, phrases, paragraphs, explanations, labels, bullet points, titles, subtitles, bold, italics, fonts, color, size, picture words, across, up, down

Pictures: use portraits, diagrams, boxes, maps, cross sections, zoom in, zoom out, different angles, perspectives, arrows, icons, symbols, borders, layout

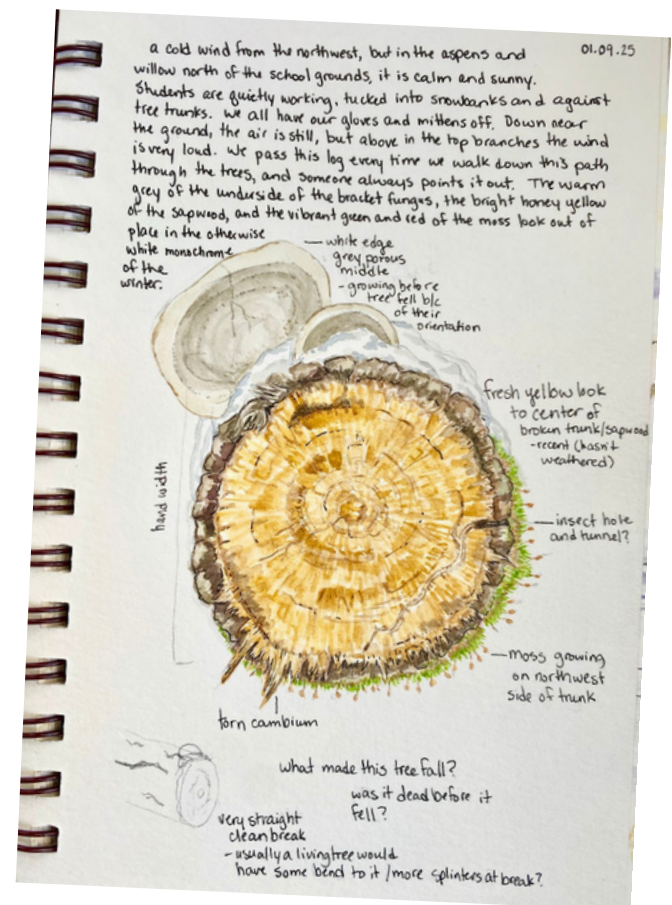
Numbers: use counting, measuring, time, estimating, show scale, tables, charts, graphs, tally

More information, including tutorial videos, demonstrations, and an incredible wealth of other free nature journaling resources can be found online at johnmuirlaws.com and wildwonder.org

Ecological Restoration

This unit plan was developed to support students and land partners during the process of establishing native species plantings (shelterbelts, pollinator strips, tiny forests, etc.) in projects across Saskatchewan through the work of One School One Farm.

However, anyone can enjoy finding nearby spaces to care for and build relationship with. Nature journaling is one approach to deepening connection and intimacy with a space, and creating a really special and personal account of your experiences growing and learning alongside a place that matters to you.

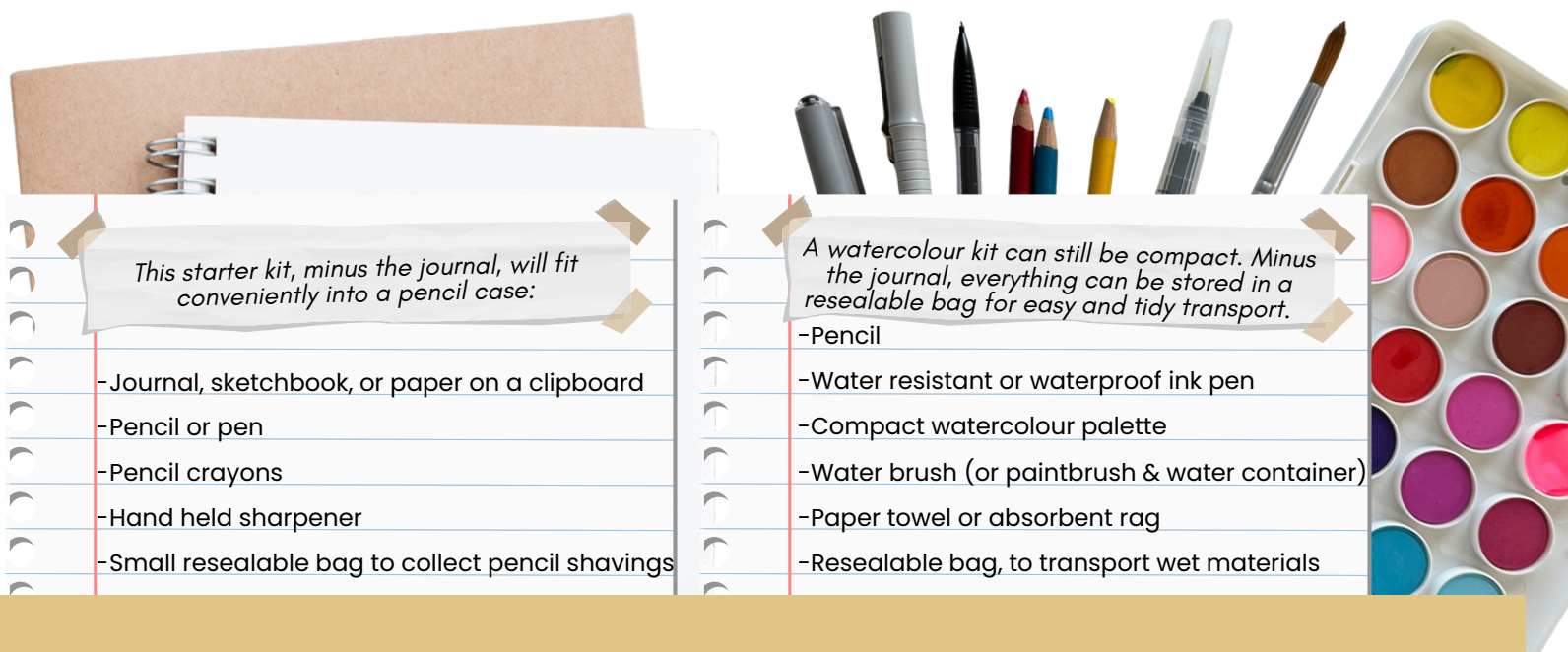


Materials

There are many options for nature journaling materials, and it may take some experimenting to decide what works best for yourself, your students, budget, class size, and the weather. At the least you will need some paper fastened to a firm surface and a pen or pencil.

As an introduction to nature journaling, you might have students make their own sketchbooks as they prepare to go out into the field. Basic bond paper will work for most dry media; use legal or tall paper for wider pages and a booklet stapler to fashion simple and affordable journals. Consider adding some mixed media or watercolour paper, which will hold up to wet media. If students are working on one sheet of paper at a time, these can be collected and bound as a booklet later on. Start with a limited number of pages. Three 8.5x11 sheets folded, cut in half, inset, and stapled to create a mini nature journal with twelve pages is easy, quick, and affordable to assemble. Add a colored cardstock cover and washi tape over the spine to make it feel special. Importantly, the size and shape of this starter journal is inviting and feels manageable for kids; a quick sense of accomplishment.

A small selection of pencil crayons is an easy medium to get started with as it's portable, budget-friendly, provides a range of hues, allows for some blending, works in most weather conditions, and doesn't require any extra preparation or clean-up. Watercolour washes (thin layers of paint) are quick and visually appealing, but can be difficult to work with in sub-zero temperatures. In warmer seasons, this medium can be made much more accessible in the field with ready-made palettes and water brushes (a paint brush with a small water reservoir in the handle), both of which are available in a range of options and prices. Consider also markers, brush pens, chalk pastels, and charcoal. If you'd like to work in line-and-wash (drawing in ink and then applying watercolour paint), provide water resistant or waterproof ink pens.



This starter kit, minus the journal, will fit conveniently into a pencil case:

- Journal, sketchbook, or paper on a clipboard
- Pencil or pen
- Pencil crayons
- Hand held sharpener
- Small resealable bag to collect pencil shavings

A watercolour kit can still be compact. Minus the journal, everything can be stored in a resealable bag for easy and tidy transport.

- Pencil
- Water resistant or waterproof ink pen
- Compact watercolour palette
- Water brush (or paintbrush & water container)
- Paper towel or absorbent rag
- Resealable bag, to transport wet materials

Other Considerations

Circumstances will dictate what you need for your outing. Children may be affected by heat and cold more than adults. Dress for the weather, plan for the cold or mosquitoes, and take into account hats, footwear, clothing, water, snacks, and first aid supplies that will help to ensure your outing is a success.

Other items to consider:

- Teachers may wish to bring extra water and a syringe for refilling water brushes on site if necessary.
- Binoculars and/or magnifying lenses
- A camera
- Pruners and/or a collecting bag
- Field guide, topographical map, or other resources to help with local identification
- Sit pads or small vinyl backed picnic blankets
- If students are bringing their own supplies, it is wise to have a few extra starter kits packed in the event that someone forgets or loses their own set.

Nature Journaling... Indoors?

While all of the activities described in this unit could happen outdoors, we took into account the challenge of severe winter weather in Saskatchewan, and the reality of access to natural spaces for some users. In fact, for those unaccustomed to spending extended periods of time outdoors, bringing natural materials indoors for close study can be a gentle introduction to building recognition and appreciation of the natural world. To account for this, each section of the unit provides activities for indoor study of natural materials and outdoor study in natural spaces.

These icons will appear beside each activity:



Activity is best done outdoors



Activity can be done indoors or outdoors

