

Alive Awake Alert: Journaling in Nature and Nature Writing

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject: Science

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Overview and Purpose:

A foundational skill in all science courses is a student's ability to observe the natural world. Students must be able to view the area around them in a way that addresses both qualitative characteristics as well as the quantitative nature of things. This project is designed to be a persistent activity that has students demonstrate mastery of observational skills. Students are asked to complete a week long activity describing the world around them before turning in a piece of nonfiction writing that is describing the world around them.

Educational Standards - Indiana Biology Standards

- Science and Engineering Process Standards (SEPS.2) Developing and using models and tools
 - SEPS.3 - Constructing and performing investigations
 - Indiana Learning Outcomes for Literacy in Science/Technical Subjects Grades 9-10.LST.1.1, 9-10.LST.1.2, 9-10.LST.3.3, 9-10.LST.4.1, 9-10.LST.4.2, 9-10.LST.4.3
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Objectives:

Specify skills/information that will be learned

- Observational skills
 - Data collection and interpretation
 - Reporting and sharing information
 - Scientific Writing
 - Presentation skills
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Materials Needed:

- Pencil
- Timer
- Journal Template (Sample Provided)

Other Resources:

(websites, videos, books, etc.)

- Walden - Henry David Thoreau (Chapters such as "Pond" are great for sharing observation data and application)
- Pilgrim at Tinker Creek - Annie Dillard
- A Sand County Almanac - Aldo Leopold

*These texts are samples that you can give/read to students when preparing to write stories about their nature journals

Activity:

Timeline - 4-7 class periods

This activity is designed to be an end of year activity to assess students ability to apply information they learned in life sciences (Biology, Environmental Science, AP Biology, AP Environmental Science, General Science)

On the first day, have students observe a small area for approximately 10 minutes. In that time, direct students to think about all of their senses when describing the area and reminding them of the two types of data that they can collect when making these observations. Once the 10 minutes is up, have them share the information with a peer. Have volunteers share with the class what they observed. It is also good for the teacher to have a sample of what a good observation set looks like. After sharing, read a piece of nature writing to the class for them to think about how their information can be applied to writing a piece of nonfiction.

Observation Days - For however many days you want students to journal, have them take their observation pages with them outside to record data. Suggest to the students that they look for a single object to describe one day and focus on as many details as possible. Some students also fair well with free observation over a whole landscape. Denote the difference in scale. At the end of each period, have a few students share their observations to help other students get an idea of what they should do. Sketching, drawing, listing, etc are all ways in which the students can gather data.

Writing Days - Have students write a short narrative about their observations. Read them a sample of a nature writing piece for inspiration or share with them a piece of your own writing. This exercise can prove difficult for some students who cannot make the connection between writing and reporting the data. Doing the nature writing as a two page minimum is recommended but can be differentiated into poetry or fiction if necessary.

Presentation - Have students present their work to the class. Students should either read an excerpt from their story or present a part of their project if it takes a different form.

Verification:

1. Check student understanding by having them share the events of the day
2. Ask students if they know the difference between quantitative vs qualitative traits of data.
3. Bellwork the next day to see if students observe these types of data. Project an image on the screen and then talk about what each of them write.
4. Students will submit a story and present to you the information on that topic.

Sample Journal Page

Date, Time, Weather, Location Information	Sketching and Drawings
Observational Writing Space	

