

**Nature: Observations and Descriptive Writing**  
**Annette Luongo, Huff Elementary**  
**Mountain View, California**  
**Grade 3**



**Essential Question:** How can we as writers carefully observe and then describe a place using our senses so that we effectively “paint a picture” in the reader’s mind? How can we illustrate our work to help the reader better understand what we’re aiming to communicate?

**Standards:**

- ❖ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2.A
  - Area we’ll focus on which is part of a broader standard: “include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension”
- ❖ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3
  - Area we’ll focus on which is part of a broader standard: “develop real experiences using descriptive details”
- ❖ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.4
  - With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.
- ❖ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.10
  - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Objectives:**

- Students will be able to record details through careful observations (using their five senses)

- Students will be able to write detailed, complete sentences from observations written in their notebooks.
- Students will be able to illustrate their writing to aid the reader in comprehension.

## Materials:

- Literature: **If You Spent a Day with Thoreau**, by R. Burleigh. In this picture book, Robert Burleigh and Wendell Minor imagine a special day spent with the celebrated writer and naturalist *through the eyes of a child*. Together Thoreau and the young boy watch small but significant wonders such as swimming fish, fighting ants, and clouds in the sky.
- Flute music, e.g. <https://safeshare.tv/x/GxxaCX-7C0o>
- Note-book decorating materials (pencils, papers, paints, etc.)
- Whiteboard, markers
- Nearby woods/creek or other place in nature to observe

## Day 1 Procedure:

1. In the classroom, teacher reads and discusses the picture-book: If You Spend a Day with Thoreau.
2. Explain how Thoreau is a well-known writer for various reasons. One of the things he did in his life was to revisit a place repeatedly, which is what we will do this year -- in every season. Reveal that today our class will make our first visit to our neighboring creek where we will begin to carefully notice/observe what we see, just as Thoreau did, and then we'll write about it.
3. Guide the students in decorating their own nature notebook where they will record observations, illustrate, and then practice writing rich, detailed sentences. Explain that the purpose of this notebook is to help us become a stronger writer, as those who observe carefully often write in a more detailed manner which paints a vivid picture for the reader. We will aim to be more careful observers just as Henry

was. Play flute music (use the link provided in “Materials” above), remember to share that Henry was a flute player too :-)

4. With notebooks in hand, students walk in small groups guided by an adult to the woods/creek area.
5. Once there, prompt the students to sit quietly and notice the sights and sounds around them. Teacher prompts: Close your eyes and notice the sounds that are coming to you. Rather than searching, just notice what’s there. Take a moment now to write on the left side of your notebook some observations, phrases, words, illustrations. Now open your eyes and notice the colors around you. Take a moment to write on the left side of your notebook some observations, phrases, words, illustrations. Feel a rock or a stick that is near you. Notice those sensations. Take a moment now to write on the left side of your notebook some observations, phrases, words, illustrations.
6. Walk back to class, and notice the sights and sounds as you make your way back.
7. In closing this part of the lesson, have students briefly share some of their observations.
8. Collect notebooks for continuation tomorrow. (time permitting, review them to see what observations stood out, interesting notes/details, that could be highlighted tomorrow)

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## **Day 2 Procedure:**

1. Review yesterday’s discussion of Henry Thoreau and visit to the wooded creek area. Redistribute the notebooks. Capture what the students remember on the whiteboard. Be sure to include some things that they observed while in the wood/creek area.
2. Explain that today we will use our notebooks to write descriptive sentences. On the right side of our notebook we will practice writing about our visit to the creek using descriptive sentences.

3. Model for students how to write some descriptive sentences about yesterday's observations. Show non-examples or weaker sentences that lack detail.
4. Have students write a couple of descriptive sentences with a partner about the creekside sights and sounds that we observed yesterday (they can also refer to notes on the whiteboard)
5. On their own, have students write several sentences about the experience of sitting in the wooded/ creek area. They are to focus on including their senses, writing what they saw, heard, smelled, and felt while there.
6. On a separate sheet of paper that each student will turn in, have the students choose their four favorite sentences that they wrote on their own. They will recopy these from their nature notebook onto a new piece of paper. These sentences will be illustrated as well, to further explain to the reader what they're aiming to convey. (Explain that Thoreau would often copy from his notebook onto another piece of paper) This piece of paper they turn in will be looked at by me for evidence of careful observation, use of descriptive detail and their senses.
7. Also collect the nature notebooks to be used in the next month or season, when we revisit the creek and record our observations.
8. In closing, elicit feedback about what we practiced today, and what we can consider doing to write in a more vibrant way.

**Assessment:**

- Collect the sentences/illustrations and evaluate them based on their ability to "paint a picture" using one or more of the senses.