

Young Naturalists: Nature Journal Club

Summer 2020 Information Packet



Young Naturalists is an environmental education program for kids that was started in 2015 by the CNY Chapter of the Izaak Walton League. This summer, as part of our virtual programs (every Tuesday at 1pm), we are doing a Nature Journal Club!

There are two suggested nature journal prompts to choose from each week. You can pick one, do a combination of the two, or make a nature journal entry about whatever else you find that you are most interested in! This is an opportunity for you to explore, ask questions, and develop a sense of connection to the place where you live. Be as creative as you like. Participants who complete at least eight nature journal entries and a final reflection by the end of the summer reading program (September 1) will earn a patch! More information can be found in the following pages.

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Why Nature Journal?

Nature journaling can help you notice more when you spend time in nature and train your skills of observation. This helps you think like a scientist. Many discoveries have been made because a scientist was observing something and thought “Huh, that’s interesting,” or “That’s weird, I wasn’t expecting to see that.” Nature journaling can also help you become a storyteller and artist as you use words and pictures to describe the natural world around you. You can write about your thoughts, emotions, and even write poems based on what you observe.

Taking notes or making sketches in a nature journal can help you explain what you found to other people. This is one way that naturalists and scientists share what they learn. And your nature journal becomes a record of your adventures so that you can remember them later.

You don’t have to be able to identify any species to nature journal and learn about what you observe. But if you want to, a nature journal is a great way to figure out what kinds of plants and animals are living around you. Outside, you can sketch the creature and make notes about its important features. Then you can check a field guide to try to figure out which species it is. (More about field guides in the Resources section at the end).

How to Nature Journal

The point of nature journaling is not to get all the answers, or to make pretty pictures, but to use writing, drawing, and numbers to train your skills of observation. Nature journaling can be a fun activity for family members of all ages to participate in together.

Find a place to nature journal that you can come back to repeatedly, such as your backyard or a local park. Nature journaling in the same place more than once will help you understand that place. You can also bring your nature journal when you explore someplace new. If you have a “home base”, you will be able to observe what is different about the new place.

It’s a good idea to start every nature journal entry with some basic information: the date, time, location, and weather. These can be important clues later on when you’re trying to understand your observations. For example, let’s say you want to know what kind of bird you saw. Some birds only live in certain habitats, so you’ll need to know the location. Or maybe you want to know if an animal acts differently at different times of day. The more information you include, the more questions you can ask.

Talking about what we find is an important part of the discovery process. During the weekly Young Naturalists programs on Tuesdays at 1pm, we will have time to share and discuss our nature journals. That way, we can help each other understand what we observed and ask more questions. However, you don’t have to come to the programs to participate in the Nature Journal Club. You can also share your nature journal with a friend, a family member, or another adult you know. Contact us to submit and get credit for your nature journal entries.

It can be difficult to share drawings through the camera on Zoom, because they often look fuzzy. So if you'd like, scan or take a picture of your nature journal entry, and send them in an email to cnynature@gmail.com by the day before the program that week. I will put them in my slideshow so that you can share your journal more easily.

Accessibility Statement

Young Naturalists is committed to making nature exploration accessible to everyone. If you need accommodations to be able to participate, such as an alternate prompt, please contact us at cnynature@gmail.com.

Supplies

To get started, you'll need a nature journal and a pen or pencil. You can use a composition notebook or spiral notebook left over from school, a sketchbook, a journal or diary you already use, or you can even make your own. "Rite in the Rain" notebooks are popular with naturalists and people who research the outdoors because the pages are waterproof, so they won't get ruined if it rains. But any sort of journal will work.

You can also use colored pencils, markers, crayons, or paint to add color. With tape or glue you can put things you find, like leaves and flowers, into your notebook. Or you can paste in photographs alongside your notes and drawings. Be as creative as you like, but all you really need is paper and a pencil.

Urban Nature Journals

If you think you can't make a nature journal because you live in a city or place far from the wilderness, think again. Nature is everywhere, not just in a state park. In a city, you can observe plants growing in the cracks of the sidewalk, ivy growing up a wall, an ant hill in the dirt, or pigeons with different colors. Visit a city park or a community garden to see what you can find. Lots of birds make their home in cities, from songbirds in street trees to peregrine falcons diving between tall buildings. The more closely you look, the more you will notice.

If you have a hard time finding anything interesting to observe, remember that the sky is part of nature too. How does it change day to day? Food plants and domestic animals have wild ancestors; you could make a nature journal entry about a pet, or a fruit/vegetable in your kitchen. You can also watch a livestream online of wild animals and make a nature journal entry about that. See the "Resources" section at the end for more about urban nature journals.

The Weekly Prompts

Each week, we encourage you to choose from one of the two suggested prompts. But feel free to make your nature journal entry about whatever you are most interested in. If you complete 8 nature journal entries and the final reflection by September 1, you will earn a patch. The pictures in this section and the prompts marked with an asterisk (*) are from the book “How to Teach Nature Journaling” by John Muir Laws and Emilie Lygren. Submit your nature journal entries one of two ways: 1) Share them during a Young Naturalists virtual program or 2) Email us a picture.

Week 1 Prompts (6/30/20 - 7/6/20)

Option 1: “I notice, I wonder, it reminds me of...”*

1. Find a small natural object to observe that you can hold in your hand, such as a leaf, rock, feather, snail shell, seed pod, flower, pinecone, or even a dried bean from the kitchen!
2. Sketch a drawing of the object
3. Take a few moments to make as many observations as you can about your object. Observations are perceived through the senses (sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste).
4. Next, ask questions about the object (“I wonder...”)
5. Finally, think of as many things as you can that the object reminds you of. It could be something you saw somewhere else, read about, saw on a nature special. Does it remind you of any memories or experiences? Be creative and playful. Any connection that comes to mind is important.

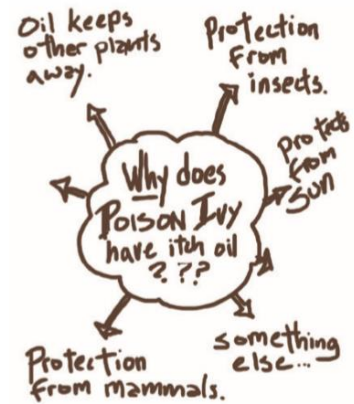


Option 2: Spend some time in nature, observing everything you can. Write down one thing you: see, hear, smell, feel (sense of touch) and feel (emotion).

Week 2 Prompts (7/7/20 - 7/13/20)

Option 1: Mysteries and Explanations*

1. There are mysteries everywhere in nature. Making observations and asking questions is a way to discover mysteries other people might never notice. First, find something in nature to focus on that you are curious about.
2. Start by making some observations or connections ("I notice..." or "It reminds me of...")
3. Then, take a few minutes to ask questions based on your observations. For example, you might notice holes in a leaf, and wonder how they got there. Or you might see a bird's beak that reminds you of a tool, and wonder if it works in a similar way. Use "Who, what, when, where, and why" to ask as many questions as you can.
4. Make more observations to come up with some possible answers to your questions. Use the language of uncertainty -- start your explanations with words like "Maybe" and "Possibly." You don't know for sure what's going on, so come up with lots of different possible explanations to your mysteries. Your explanations don't need to be correct, but make sure they are based on evidence.
5. Go back and forth between making observations, asking questions, and coming up with explanations. An explanation might lead you to notice something new, and have another question.
6. Pick one question or mystery that you explored and came up with multiple explanations for. Which explanation has the most evidence to support it?



Option 2: Similarities and Differences*

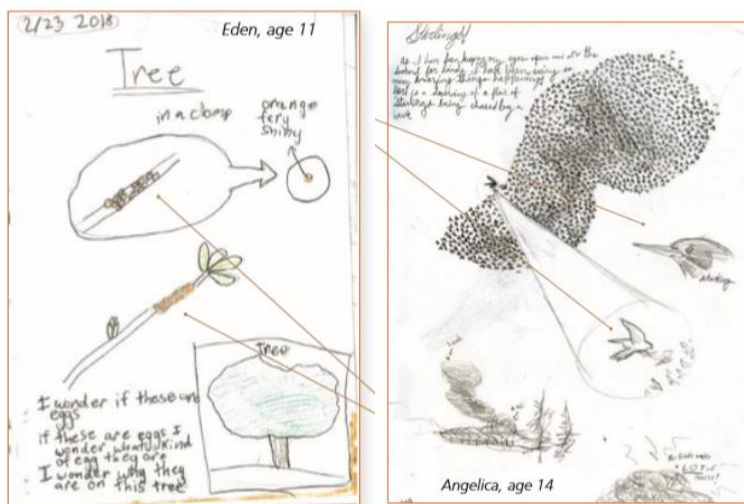
Find two creatures/natural objects that are relatively similar (two trees, plants, leaves, rocks, insects, birds etc). Record the similarities and differences you notice, using words, pictures, and numbers. Think about how to set up your paper. You could divide your paper with a line in the middle and sketch one object on each side. Or, you might make a Venn Diagram.



Week 3 Prompts (7/14/20 - 7/20/20)

Option 1: Zoom In, Zoom Out*

1. Choose a subject that you will observe at three points of view: life size, close up, and more distant. Record all your observations on the same page. At every stage, use a combination of words, pictures, and numbers. Write notes and ask questions.
2. In the middle of your page, draw your subject life size (or part of it, if it's bigger than the page).
3. Zoom In: Choose an interesting part to observe up close. Draw a circle around that part in the drawing you already made. Draw a larger circle on the side of the page that shows a magnified view of the same part, with details that are too small to see in the life size drawing.
4. Step back and make a final sketch, this time zoomed out to take in the whole subject and some of its environment. You could show a side view of the subject, or a small map of its overall shape and where it is in the environment.



Option 2: Nature Haiku

Haikus are a type of short poem that often focus on observations of nature. A haiku has just 3 lines. The first line has 5 syllables, the second line has 7 syllables, and the last line has 5 syllables. Spend a bit of time outside paying attention to what you notice today, journaling or making notes. Then write a haiku about something you observed. For more information on haikus, and to read some examples, see:

<https://writeshop.com/writing-haiku-poem/>

Week 4 Prompts (7/21/20 - 7/27/20)

There are millions of insect species. They live all around us, and ecosystems depend on them! This week, go on a safari to observe this incredible diversity. Choose one of three options. Make some notes and sketches about what insects you find (and other arthropods, like spiders and millipedes).

Option 1: Insect Safari -- Ground

1. Dig in the soil, or lift up some rocks and logs. You can also place rocks or an upside-down flower pot on the ground and come back in a couple days. What crawly critters are living in the soil?

Option 2: Insect Safari -- Night

1. At night, set up a “shining sheet”: put up a white sheet over a railing or between two trees, with a light or flashlight behind it. Wait and watch for visitors.

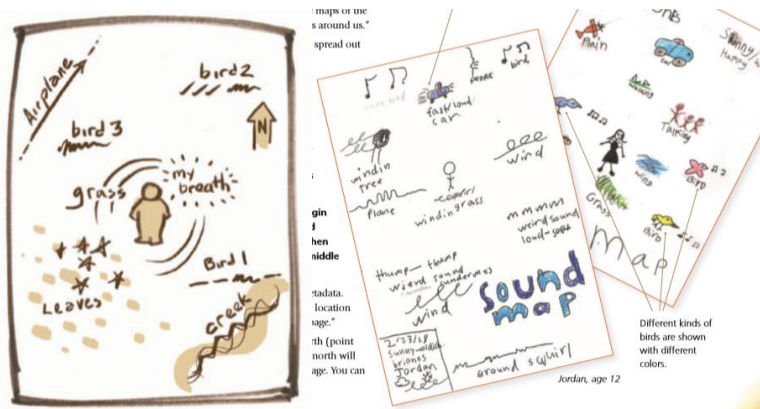
Option 3: Insect Safari -- Plants

1. Observe flowers and plants. What kinds of insects come to the plants? What are they doing?

Week 5 Prompts (7/28/20 - 8/3/20)

Option 1: Soundscape Map*

1. Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and breathe deeply and slowly. For a minute, just listen to the sounds around you.
2. Make a little drawing of yourself in the middle of the page. Record the sounds you hear. Start with the most distant sounds you hear at the edge of the page, and work your way in. You can use words, pictures, diagrams, or symbols to represent the sounds.



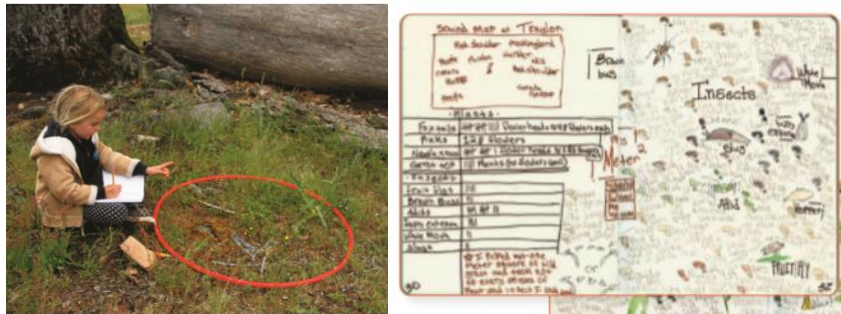
Option 2: Wild Point of View

Spend a few minutes observing a plant, animal, or insect. What would it be like to be that creature? What would you think and feel? Write a nature journal entry from the point of view of that creature.

Week 6 Prompts (8/4/20 - 8/10/20)

Option 1: Mini Maps*

1. Choose a small area of ground to focus on, about the size of a hula hoop. Mark it out with a hula hoop or piece of string. Try to pick an area with different kinds of weeds and plants. This is your tiny world to study. When you train yourself to look closely, you can find amazing things anywhere, even hidden in plain sight.
2. Look for plants, animals, natural objects, evidence of animals, or any other interesting treasures. Describe what you find using words, pictures, and numbers. You don't have to make a detailed drawing of everything. When you feel like you are finished, challenge yourself to see what else you can notice.



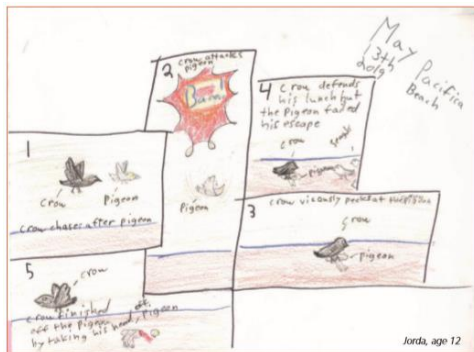
Option 2: Imaginary Creature

Every plant and animal has adaptations that help it survive. Spend some time observing nature, and make note of any adaptations, features, or traits that seem cool or interesting to you today. Then, using your imagination, design a magical/imaginary creature inspired by what you observed. Does your creature have moss for fur? Skin the color of a flower you saw? Horns in the shape of a flower bud? Maybe it can run up tree trunks like a squirrel? It's up to you! How is your imaginary creature adapted for its environment?

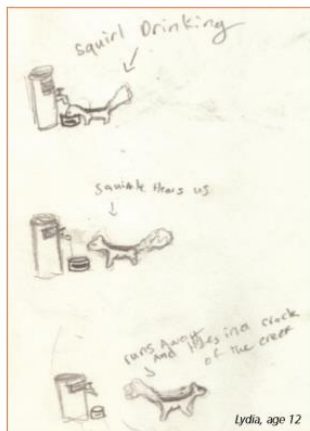
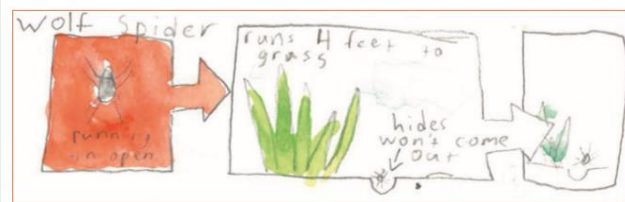
Week 7 Prompts (8/11/20 - 8/17/20)

Option 1: Event Comic*

1. Spend some time in nature until you observe a cool "nature moment" that you want to record.
2. Review the details and order of events you just observed; say them out loud to yourself or someone you are with, or write some notes in your journal.
3. Now, document the event by making a true-life nature comic. Think about ways you could set up your journal page. How do comics or graphic novels you've read tell a story? You could include interesting points of view (such as from an animal), some long or tall panels, sound effects, close-ups, action symbols, arrows showing movement, or other techniques.
4. Write a plan for the number of panels/scenes you want to show. Then create your comic! If you want, add a title that captures the event.



Arielle, age 10



Option 2: Habitat Map

Draw a map of the area you live. Does it have all the requirements for bird or wildlife habitat? (Food, water, shelter, and a place to raise young). If not, draw a second map of the area around your home *as if it did include them*. What would you add (or take away) to improve the habitat?

Week 8 Prompts (8/18/20 - 8/25/20)

Option 1: Timed Observations*

1. Find an animal or a group of animals to observe. Observe the animal for five minutes, and list the behaviors you see. Try not to make assumptions or explain the behaviors; just write what you observe. For example, instead of saying “looking for predators” say “standing, head and ears up.”
2. Put the behaviors you saw into 4 to 10 major categories (Eating, being still, walking, running, sitting up, vocalizing, etc.)
3. Every 20 seconds, make a tally mark next to the behavior that the animal is doing at that moment. You can keep track of the time with a stopwatch, phone timer, or by counting to 20 in your head.
4. Observe the animal for at least five minutes, recording its behavior every 20 seconds.
5. Bonus: Make a simple bar graph to compare the behaviors.
6. What behaviors did you see the most? Which were uncommon? What might be some possible explanations for these patterns?



Option 2: Using all the observation skills you’ve developed this summer, find something in nature that’s not what it seems.

Final Reflection

Write a journal entry (at least a paragraph) looking back on your experience this summer. Which nature journal prompts were your favorite? What skills did you improve by keeping a nature journal? What did it make you think about? What else did you learn from this experience? Do you want to keep a nature journal in the future?

Resources

Young Naturalists

Contact us at: cnynature@gmail.com

Young Naturalists Website

<https://cnynature.wixsite.com/youngnaturalists>

Izaak Walton League of America

<https://www.iwla.org/>

Nature Journals

John Muir Laws is the author of *The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling*, *The Laws Guide to Drawing Birds*, and *How to Teach Nature Journaling*. His website is chock-full of free nature journal resources, drawing how-tos, videos, and more. Highly recommended.

<https://johnmurlaws.com/>

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation: Nature Journaling and Outdoor Activities for Kids

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/education/72444.html>

How to Make a Nature Journal

<https://rhythmsofplay.com/get-outside-connect-create-nature-journal-notebook/>

How to Start a Nature Journal with Kids

<https://thimbleandtwig.com/how-to-start-a-nature-journal-with-kids/>

Field Guides and ID Tools

iNaturalist

<https://www.inaturalist.org/>

Merlin Bird ID App

<https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

All About Birds

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/>

Amphibians and Reptiles of NYS

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/277.html>

Insects and Invertebrates

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/273.html>

National Geographic Kids: Animals

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/>

Science and Nature Field Guides for Kids

<https://www.acornnaturalists.com/products/field-guides.html>

Animal Livestreams

Cornell Lab of Ornithology Bird Cams: feeder birds, hawks, ospreys, tropicbirds, and more

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/>

Monterey Bay Aquarium Web Cams: Coral reefs, jellyfish, penguins, sharks, otters, and more

<https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/animals/live-cams>

Smithsonian National Zoo Web Cams: Elephants, lions, pandas, naked mole-rat, cheetah, and black-footed ferret

<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/webcams>

Urban Nature Journals

Finding Urban Nature - Nature activities for kids in the city

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/idea/finding-urban-nature/>

Urban naturalist: Molly Steinwald challenges city kids to find the wilderness in a sidewalk crack

<https://grist.org/cities/urban-naturalist-molly-steinwald-challenges-city-kids-to-find-the-wilderness-in-a-sidewalk-crack-2/>

From Puddles to Pigeons: Learning About Nature in Cities

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2018/learning-about-nature-cities>

Finding Nature in Urban Settings

<https://runwildmychild.com/finding-nature-in-urban-settings/>

10 Ways to Find Nature in Urban Settings

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/10-ways-find-nature-urban-settings>