

Inspirations from the Forest

Field Journal Observations and Exercises

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Nature journals help bridge the gap between art and science. Nature journaling provides an opportunity to dissect the natural world through the study of the intricacy of feathers, leaves, and colors that make up the chaos of nature. It is a great way to understand and be comfortable in the outdoors, and can help people enjoy their national forests and parks, as well as their own backyards.

Use these instructions to help you through the following seven exercises. They are designed for the beginning nature journalist, though skilled artists and scientists can enjoy them as well. You should be able to complete all seven exercises in less than 60 minutes; but if you would like to explore each lesson more thoroughly, you could devote a day to each one.

Your minimum equipment needs are pencil and paper, but you might also want to have a journal, waterproof pen, watercolors and brush, color pencils, ruler, field guides, pack or bag, good footwear, water, food, and a hat. Field specimens—such as leaves, feathers, shells, and flowers—may be helpful too.

Exercise #1: FIELD JOURNAL ENTRY

Field Journaling is the heart and soul of field biology. Field scientists have been recording their findings for centuries. This lesson captures the important scientific data used for analysis, whether it is for gray wolf studies in Alaska, northern spotted owl observations in Washington State, or the Christmas Bird Count in a Virginia backyard. Be sure that the date also includes the year. (*Quickly done in 5 minutes.*)

Exercise #2 GET TO KNOW ...

This task familiarizes you with the “tools of the trade,” including paper, pens, and pencils, as well as colored pencils and paints. It is a good idea to test all your materials before you begin to draw and paint. Don’t forget to label each medium used. (*Quickly done in 3 minutes.*)

Exercise #3: BLIND CONTOUR DRAWINGS

Blind contour drawings are really fun! They are designed to break down inhibitions towards art—the “I can’t draw” or the “make it perfect” syndromes. Few artists can produce beautiful work without looking at the paper, but this exercise teaches you to be a keen observer.

Note: It’s helpful to have leaves or feathers for drawing specimens. (*Quickly done in 7 minutes.*)

“There is delight in the Hardy Life of the open.”

**—Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919),
American president and naturalist**

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Field Journal Observations and Exercises *(continued)*

Exercise #4: GESTURE DRAWINGS

Gesture drawings are another exercise designed to loosen up your drawing arm and your scientific brain. Now you can look at the paper and the subject, but be fluid in your “recording” of the object. Shading adds texture and perspective by “highlighting” the shadows on the drawn object. It can be done using darker pencil/pen strokes, deeper colors, stippling, slashing, and dotting. *(Quickly done in 5 minutes.)*

Exercise #5: DRAW 5 ITEMS FROM NATURE

Now is the time to put your drawing exercises to work by getting outside to record your findings “in the field.” Wander an area, look for and draw five items from nature—plants, animals, and evidence (such as tracks and scat). Bring along wildlife and plant field guides to identify your observations. Other useful items to bring are binoculars, hand lens, collection bags, thermometer, map, and compass. *(Quickly done in 15 minutes.)*

Exercise #6: IDENTIFY 10 ITEMS

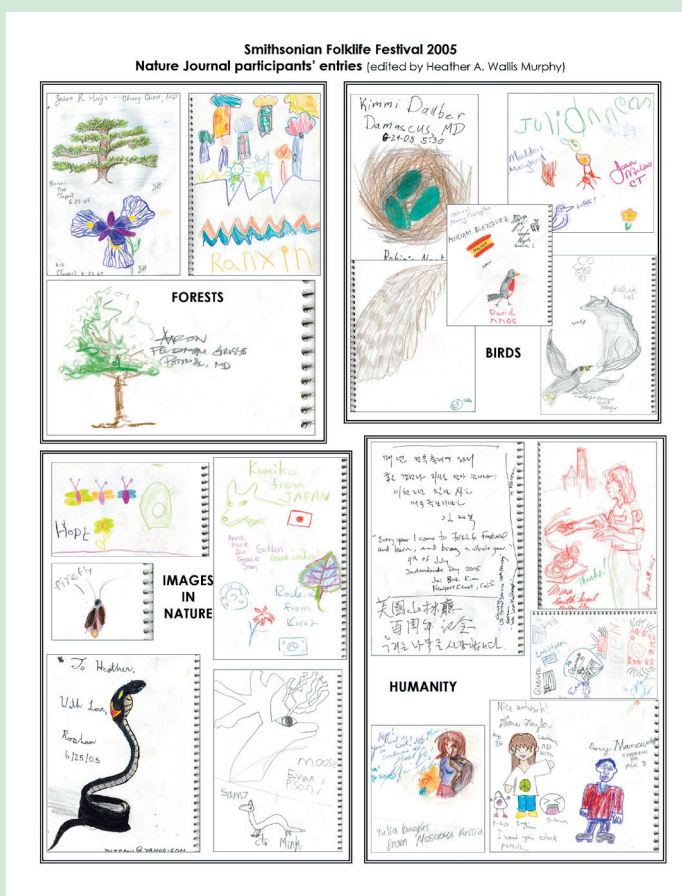
If you do not have time to finish a colored drawing or painting in the outdoors, this exercise allows you to bring back color to the studio for future reference. Simply draw a box, and fill it in with corresponding colored pencils or watercolors, and label it. *(Quickly done in 10 minutes.)*

Exercise #7: FINAL NATURE JOURNAL

Go wild with art and science! You have 15 minutes to draw a natural subject using any drawing technique with any media. A word of caution: limit the composition to a simple or singular object, such as a feather or a leaf. This allows you to really study in detail without getting overwhelmed by a landscape or a still-life display. If time allows, end with a critique session. *(Quickly done in 15 minutes.)*

EXTRA BONUS – Nature Journal Entries from the 2005 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

During the 2005 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, there was a nature journal for people to draw, color, paint, write, and sign in. Over 450 people signed or drew in the journal. They were from all over the United States, as well as 14 countries including El Salvador, Puerto Rico, India, China, Korea, Japan, Russia, England, Ireland, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the Sultanate of Oman. A collective journal makes a great addition to events. The following is a sampling of artwork contributed by Festival visitors.



“Painting is just another way of keeping a diary.”
—Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Spanish artist.

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Field Journal Observations and Exercises *(continued)*

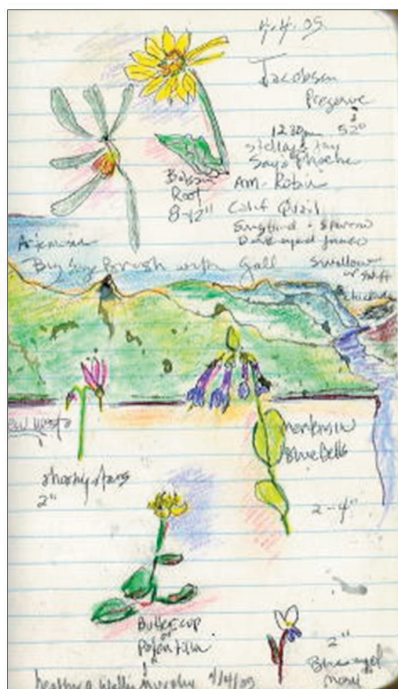
FIELD JOURNAL OBSERVATIONS & EXERCISES



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Smithsonian Folklife Festival—Learning Guide

#1 FIELD JOURNAL ENTRY



Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Location: _____

Weather & Moon Phase: _____

Habitat & Growth Stages: _____

OBSERVATIONS:

List Plants _____

List Birds, Mammals & More _____

#2 GET TO KNOW...

- ...Your paper, pens and pencils;
- Scribble and label each "medium".

Pencil



Pen



#3 BLIND CONTOUR DRAWINGS

Individual Subject

- Choose a person, wildlife or plant;
- Look at your subject;
- Keep your pencil on the paper;
- Draw without looking at the paper;
- Draw a contour outline of the subject;
- Draw what you see;
- Draw without much detail;
- Draw for 15 sec, 30 sec, and 1 minute;
- Label the subjects & drawing method.



Landscapes

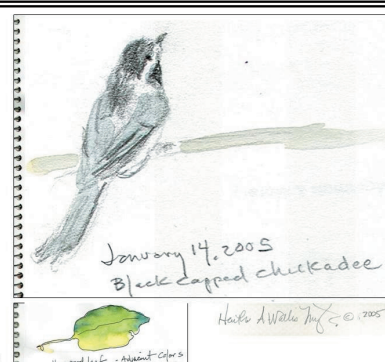
- Study the horizon line;
- Keep your pencil on the paper;
- Blind contour draw the junction of sky-and-land;
- Draw for 1 min. ;
- Label subject.



Field Journal Observations and Exercises *(continued)*

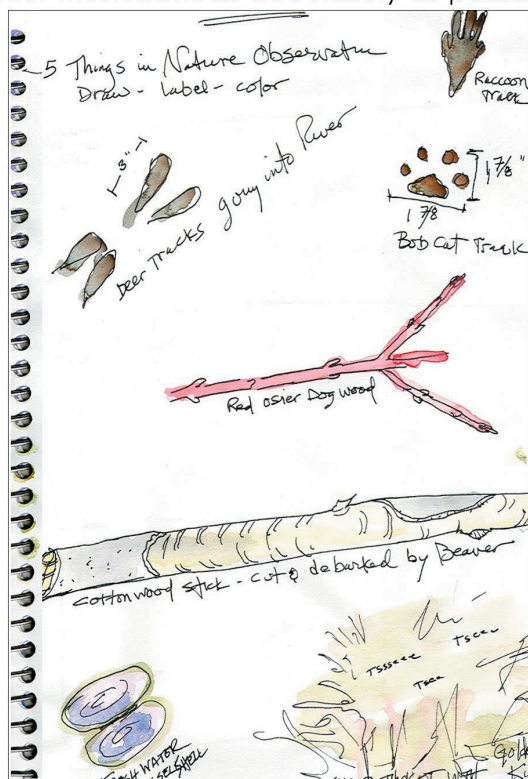
#4 GESTURE DRAWINGS

- Select an object in nature;
- Draw while looking at your subject AND the paper;
- Use loose circular, curved, squiggly lines (gesture drawings);
- Do a 30 sec & 60 sec practice;
- Complete a drawing in 5 minutes;
- Add shading using dots, line or color.



#5 DRAW 5 ITEMS FROM NATURE

- Quick-sketch your choice of tracks, twigs, plants, birds, shells, insects, etc.;
- Label each item, include size and number;
- Color each item as accurately as possible.



#6 IDENTIFY 10 ITEMS

- To quickly capture colors in nature...
- Draw a box & record the items' color;
- Describe the item beside the box.



#7 FINAL NATURE JOURNAL EXERCISE

- Draw an item from nature, use any style you like;
- Color your drawing (if familiar, use "color theory");
- Capture detail in the drawing;
- complete in 15 minutes;
- Share final drawing with classmates.

