

Nature Journaling

By Mark Phillips, Homeschool Coordinator

Three nature journaling “handles”:

- **Writing words**
- **Drawing pictures**
- **Keeping track**

Nature journaling is simple! Many people find it both a helpful part and a fun part of developing as a well-rounded student. So I want to offer you three simple handles that I hope will help you to grab onto this rewarding habit.

Writing words

Everyday observations – recording the simple facts of what you observe in nature

Sometimes journaling can involve writing words that are simple observations of an everyday event - something you observe or learn that you want to remember, like the name of a plant, or a brief description of something you saw on a hike.

Recently the Fossil Rim Board of Directors took an interest in a species of bird that can be seen in our area. It is called a Loggerhead shrike. They were very interested to know if and when anyone on staff had seen one. I knew that I had seen one on Fossil Rim property, and thankfully, I had journaled when and where I saw it. So, when asked, I was able to get my journal and know that I saw a Loggerhead shrike in the Game Preserve Pasture on February 25, 2014.

That little note that I made that day was an example of journaling an everyday observation. Over a year after the fact, I was really glad that I had taken the time to put it down in words!

Reflections – taking time, as you observe nature around you, to think about how things fit together

This spring we had a nature journaling class. I really enjoyed it; mostly because I enjoy my students, but also because that day, after some reflection, I was able to put into words some thoughts that had been swirling around in my head for a while.

Part of our class was a time for each child and parent (and the teacher) to go out and sit in nature and write something. It just had to be something true that you observed or remembered or ‘put together’ by sitting in the beauty of nature and taking time to think and write... while looking at the order and the beauty of it all.

I had been thinking about the changes that were happening in my life, and how those changes required me to change... and yet I didn’t want to let go of how things had been. But when we took time to be still and sit... and look... I saw a mix, a balance of permanence and change all around us! I was reminded that BOTH change and permanence have always been interwoven into my life... and that each makes the other more beautiful and more appreciated.

And I wrote these words:

“Change.
We’re made for permanence, yet
it’s guaranteed NOT to be..... not YET.
Stayed is not static;
stable is not stuck.”

Later in the same day, I added:

“brave is not bull-headed;
bold is not unbending.”

Finally, on another day, I finished it all:

“So be stayed, be stable;
be brave, be bold...
and bend.”

It was a valuable experience writing that little poem the first day; it was even more valuable seeing and experiencing the PROCESS of journaling play out as the poem and the learning developed over time!

In the present, reflective journaling is helping me to balance the change and the permanence in my life. In the future, I will be able to show my grandchildren how I learned that lesson.... over time... through journaling.

Rare observations – not forgetting to put into words the rare things you get to observe in nature

Just over three months ago, I wrote in my nature journal:

“March 23, 2016

High Hope Ranch / Wendy & David Moore

Jaguarundi

- not black, but very dark grey-brown
- uniform in color
- bushy tail
- cat-like movements!
- about 3 feet long”

It happened so quickly! My friends and I had seen something rare! It was something I had been hoping to see since I first moved to Texas 26 years ago! We saw a cat that I am sure was a jaguarundi! ! I wanted to remember the details for later....so I was quick to put it down in my journal.

Writing things down in words can be so simple when the thoughts are fresh in your mind. Just a few days later those thoughts and memories can be very hard to put into words! That’s one of the beauties of nature journaling: you can put those thoughts into words in your journal so that those thoughts are never lost!