

Create a Naturalist's Journal

Ages: 4–11 (Pre-K–Grade 5)

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials needed:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Markers, crayons, and/or colored pencils
- Your five senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste
- If available, a ruler, thermometer, magnifying glass, or other tools for measuring data
- If outdoors, use natural specimens found in a park or in your backyard
- If indoors, use natural specimens like houseplants, fruits, vegetables, or pets as subjects

Procedure:

Naturalists record their work using journals. These are often small notebooks that they carry around with them as they explore different habitats. The journals of famous naturalists, such as Charles Darwin or Lewis, Clark, and Sacagawea have been studied for years to learn about the different places they explored and the flora and fauna they observed. Naturalist journals are important in documenting what living things existed in a certain place and at a certain time. The American West that Lewis, Clark, and Sacagawea documented in their naturalist journals in the early 1800s looks very different from the American West of today.

In this activity, you will be making your own naturalist journal. Use this journal to document the habitat around you.

- 1. Gather pieces of paper.** This can be whatever paper you have around your home—printer paper, notebook paper, or even just scraps.
- 2. Arrange the paper into a booklet.** Take as much creative liberty as you like when making these journals. You can staple all the pieces together as they are, fold the papers in half and staple the edges, make an accordion book by folding the paper, or find your own original method. Label the front page of your journal “[insert your name]’s Naturalist’s Journal.”

- 3. Explore your environment and document what you find in your journal.** You can explore the flora and fauna in your home (house plants, pets, other people) or, if you are able to, document what you see outside during this time.
- 4. Use your five senses to experience what you are documenting, or recording, in your journal.** Write what each subject looks like, smells like, sounds like, feels like, and—if it is safe—what it tastes like. Then draw or color a picture of the subject. Add any other details that are important. Maybe you describe how the subject is behaving differently now than it usually would. Maybe the subject is living in a different space, or in a different way, than usual. Add anything that you think is interesting or notable! Use labels and words as well as your drawings to record your observations.
- 5. Include details about the environment.** Is it warm or cold? Is it light or dark? Is the weather outside of interest? What time of year is it? What is the date? What time of day is it? Include this data with your record.
- 6. Keep this journal as a document of your experience.** Add more pages, or make a new journal, if you want to continue to add to it. You or someone else may use your journal(s) one day to learn about a certain place and time, just like we do now with the naturalist journals of the past!

Share your work:

Take a picture of your journal (or specific entries) and post it to Instagram using the hashtags #MuseumFromHome and #NaturalistsJourney, and tag the Hudson River Museum.

