

Keeping a Nature Journal

by Bonnie Johanna Gisel, Ph.D.

Make your own Nature Journal!

Instructions: Make as many copies of the Nature Journal as you need. Fold the page in half so the all the text is on the top half. Use scissors to carefully cut the page in half along the fold. Put the top half on top of the bottom half, and fold in the other direction like a booklet. You now have a simple Nature Journal small enough to carry in the field. Add as many inside blank pages as you like. Use a hole punch to punch two holes on the fold. Use red ribbon to tie the pages together [The back of the booklet explains why!]. Read and use the guidelines below to begin writing and drawing in your Nature Journal!



What Is A Nature Journal?

A Nature Journal is a place to grow your thoughts, feelings, ideas, activities, observations, and relationship with the natural world. And, it is an opportunity to interpret your inner thoughts out into the natural world and a space where the natural world can flow into you and leave a permanent mark.

Purpose

We can learn a lot about keeping a Nature Journal from John Muir, the inspiration for, and the first president of the Sierra Club. Muir studied and cared about wilderness. He sought to preserve wild places and is considered one of the founders of the modern environmental movement. Muir wrote in his journals about the beauty he saw in nature. He also drew sketches detailing information about plants, animals, mountains, and landscapes. He used his journals to compose letters to friends, articles, and books to share his love of nature and to enlist people's support to preserve wilderness. Muir's journals gave him a wealth of recorded experience from which ten books and over two hundred articles were published. We continue to gain insight into Nature's beauty and importance in our lives from Muir's writings.

Your own Nature Journal provides an opportunity to study the natural world, to grow a deeper relationship with the Earth, to develop a greater awareness and caring for the Earth. A Nature Journal is an opportunity for personal growth and to study the evolving natural world.

Observing Nature

1. Nature is the source of inspiration for a Nature Journal. Observing nature is more important than writing.
2. Preconceived ideas about the natural world are a hindrance to your ability to create a union between what you see and what you write. Clear your mind and be open to discovery. Artist Asher Durand wrote: "Art is unworthy and vicious when at variance with Truth," the truth found in Nature. The same may be applied to writing about Nature and about your relationship with wilderness. According to Durand, "do not be poisoned

by conventionalism, the substitution of falsehood for truth." Look closely at nature, observe with a keen eye, record what you see in your own inimitable way - make it personal, permit it to resonate against your soul.

3. Build upon experience, remembering a certain order of events, relating one to another. Look closely at nature and then look again and recall patterns, motions; consider the weather, sky, sounds, temperature, reflect upon Nature's temperament.
4. Select, perhaps, one place that you revisit and record the changes that occur there season after season.
5. Consider carrying a field guide to wildflowers, trees, birds, mammals or insects to assist in identification.

How To Begin Writing A Nature Journal

1. Listen to Nature's voice, literally and figuratively, and provide descriptive words and details for mountains, rivers, streams, flowers, trees, creatures, and the way the natural world interacts and is engaged in daily activity. Consider how you are part of that ecosystem and that diversity. Look at Nature as if through a lens. Study sounds, movements, atmosphere.
2. Incorporate your feelings, mood, observations, and those you might attribute to wildflowers, meadows, rivers, mountains, and streams. Provide Nature with a voice.
3. Begin writing. Write often. Do not be too critical or edit your writing to the detriment of spontaneity. Let your writing flow.
4. Write as if writing a letter to yourself or to a close friend or family member. Create a narrative account, write a story for yourself.
5. Write prose or poetry or a combination of both - you need not consider yourself a writer or a poet! Complete sentences are optional.
6. Draw pictures with words; incorporate drawings into your journal; incorporate photographs or press a leaf or a flower between pages of your journal.
7. Read the writings of other nature writers: Gilbert White, William Bartram, Meriwether Lewis, John Wesley Powell, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, [John Muir](#), John Burroughs, Edward Abbey, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Gary Snyder, Bill McKibben, Diane Ackerman, Gretel Ehrlich.

Final Thoughts

Liberty Hyde Bailey, a founder of Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and author of *The Holy Earth*, noted: "one does not act rightly toward one's fellows if one does not know how to act rightly toward the Earth." Keeping a Nature Journal will help inspire you to deepen your relationship with the Earth, and to develop a greater awareness and caring for the Earth.

Bonnie Johanna Gisel is currently the Curator, [LeConte Memorial Lodge](#), Sierra Club, Yosemite National Park, and the author of [Kindred and Related Spirits: The Letters of John Muir and Jeanne C. Carr](#). © Copyright 2002 Bonnie Johanna Gisel; used by permission.

Nature Journal

John Muir, a founding member and first president of the Sierra Club, studied and cared about wilderness. He sought to preserve wild places and is considered the Father of Our National Parks, and especially of Yosemite. Muir wrote in his journals about the beauty he saw in nature. He drew pictures detailing information about plants, animals, mountains and landscapes. He used his journals to compose letters to friends, articles, and books to share his love of nature and enlist people's support to preserve wilderness. Marion Parsons, a mountaineer and early Sierra Club leader who helped him write his last book, tied red ribbon around his writings to organize them in his "scribble den" at the family ranch in Martinez, California.

For more about John Muir: <http://johnmuir.info>
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