

# **Nature Journaling by Lindsay Strout**

*What it is, how to do it, prompts to get you started!*

## **Resources**

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Facebook: Maine Nature Journal Club - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mainenaturejournalclub>  
The Nature Connection - Clare Walker Leslie © 2010  
<https://johnmuirlaws.com/> (Events, PDF download “How to Teach Nature Journaling”)  
Make a Date with Nature - Paula Peeters © 2016

The word “journal” means a daily record of observations. “Nature” means the physical world, including both the living (animals & plants) and nonliving (landscape, rocks, soil, air, water) parts of Earth.

## **So, what is Nature Journaling?**

Nature Journaling can be anything you want it to be, ranging from personal to scientific, from facts & realistic images to scenes and stories you’ve imagined. Journaling should NEVER be a “chore”, or something you *have* to complete and it *must* be perfect. You do not need to be an expert at identifying plants and animals or even a professional artist, remember the goal is “observations” not a pretty picture.

This is a practice that you will build upon and in time, your ability to observe, draw and write will improve. Your attention to detail and appreciation of the world around you will also increase as you journal.

## **Why do it?**

We live in a world that is fast-paced, busy and technology infested. It’s not necessarily a bad thing, but could be contributing to anxiety and depression. Spending a bit of quiet time in nature is good for both our physical and mental health. It’s a way to stay present in the moment, a practice of mindfulness. Our ever changing climate is affecting species and ecosystems in our backyards. Nature journaling may help us observe and record these changes. By being still and quiet, animals become less scared and you may be able to observe behaviours that most people don’t, as they are too loud, too fast or not evening looking.

## **Where to Start & What to Include**

Location: anywhere there is nature. The beach, rocky shores, parks, playgrounds, farms, your back/front yard, a garden... \*\*also can be done from using pictures you\*\*

Leave your technology at home or in your car and either go for a walk or just find a place to sit in and around nature. Once you're out there, close your eyes for a few minutes and slow down your breathing, this will help to slow your mind, relax and focus on the task.

### **The 1st page...**

The first page of your journal can be intimidating to say the least. A brand new sketchbook is a beautiful thing, full of possibilities! Many people when they start journaling put pressure on themselves to make the first entry beautiful and perfect! Well... it's probably not going to be perfect. Again, it's a new practice to many of us. Like making pancakes for the first time. Was it perfect, nope! Did you get better and better after trying more times... hopefully yes! Be kind to yourself, and don't panic.

Your nature journal should be playful, adventurous, an extension of yourself.

### **Record your Metadata:**

- **Date, Time, Location**
- Weather
- Words
- Numbers
- Sketches
- Observations (sights, sound, touch & smell)
- Reflections
- How you feel
- Wonder
- Questions that you have

### **\*\*\* NEVER APPROACH WILDLIFE \*\*\***

"The trouble is, most of us have a voice in our head telling us it can't be done. But you need to ignore that voice, and just try."  
- Paula Peeters -

## **PROMPTS**

**Contour Drawing** - find something to draw, it helps if it doesn't move, maybe a leaf or a tree. Focus on that subject, then place your pen/pencil on the paper and begin to draw. Don't look at your paper, just focus on the subject and don't lift your pen/pencil off the paper. Draw every detail you see. Go slowly, take your time and don't look at your drawing until you're done.

**I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me Of...** - focus on a small part of nature you can hold in your hand, such as a leaf, pinecone, acorn or seed pod. Make an observation "I notice...", then ask a question "I wonder...", next make connections "It reminds me of..."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v079W4IZ0TU>

**Colour Mapping** - find something that has a few colours (5-10 ish) in it. Flowers, fruit, and even leaves or tree bark (if you're lucky a chipmunk!) Draw a simple sketch of the subject then label on the

sketch where the colours are located. You can fill these colours in later when you have coloured pencils or markers.

**5-4-3-2-1** - 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, 1 think you could (but should not) taste. List and/or draw/sketch these things.

**Listening** - sit and listen for 5 minutes, try to distinguish as many different sounds as possible. Where are they coming from? To your right, left, above you, underground, on the ground? Are the sounds near/far away? I've done this from inside my tent when I've gone out camping. In the early morning when the birds are just starting to stir - listening to all the different sounds they make. Record what you hear after those 5 minutes (or maybe more if you can sit still :)

**Sound Mapping** - draw a few circles within each other (like a ripple in a pond) and map out sounds as you sit there, you can record with words or small sketches, whether they are close or far, to the right, left or in front/behind you (you are in the center of the circles)

**5 Minute Writing** - you may want to bring a timer (phone, but put it on airplane mode so nobody/nothing can distract you). Find a place to sit, set a timer for 5 minutes. Write whatever comes to mind. Don't worry about spelling errors, just write. Write until the timer sounds. If you can't think of anything, then write that. Have fun with this. Read back over what you wrote. This is what they call "Raw free-writing" and can be included in a nature journal as is.

**Find Something That's...** - write the following words on a piece of paper as headings. Leave space below each word. Big, Small, Hard, Soft, Furry, Rough, Smooth, Simple, Complex, Quiet, Loud, Shy. Then when you go out into nature, try to find things (different animals, rocks, weather, water etc.) in each of these "categories".

**Have a Conversation** - find something in a natural place - a plant, an animal, landform, rock, object, or even a dead thing like a leaf! Imagine you are having a conversation, or actually speak aloud to this thing. Maybe ask it questions, how would it answer you, or how would it respond. Write down your conversation in your journal. This activity helps you engage with your imagination.

**Get Curious** - go out and ask questions of nature. Examples: What kind of tree is that? What's the name of that plant? What kind of bird is making that noise? Make notes and sketches in your journal. With a bit of research afterwards you might be able to answer some of the questions you asked.

**To Each Its Own** - Assemble a set of small and similar objects, such as fallen leaves, shells or acorns. Make sure your objects are of the same species. Use writing, drawing and numbers to describe your objects. Record unique features, shapes and colors of each object. Compare and contrast these objects. If they are the same species, are they really the same or do they have differences?

**Zoom In, Zoom Out** - Choose something to focus on, then record observations at three scales: close up, life size, and far away. Use circles to show a magnified view for the "zoom in". In the zoomed-out view, you can include where the subject is, a small map, the overall bigger picture.

**Live Web Cams** - if you're stuck inside, or just want to be inside, go to youtube and search live web cams, sometimes nests, hunting areas,

**Tracking Tracks** - any time of year, finding tracks, sketching them, wondering what type of animal the tracks belong to.

**Find 10** - Find ten, or more natural things happening right around you & list them in your nature journal.

**Poems** - create a poem from an item, a feeling, or a thing from nature. Try an acrostic poem, haiku or even a free verse.

**Landscape** - draw a simple landscape (from your house, or maybe your favourite hike or walk). Make notes on what you see.

**What's Underneath?!** - gently turn over rocks and logs to see what's hiding under there. Lots of cold-blooded animals have wintered in the leaf litter and can be found under rotting logs and rocks.

**Starry Night** - go outside on a clear night and look up to the stars. Try to find 3 constellations, draw them and use a star chart, an app or a book to identify them. Record the direction you found the constellations in the sky from your position.

**Animals @ Night** - what animals live nearby that are nocturnal? You might not see them, but go outside a while after the sun has set and take notes/sketch on what you see and hear for wildlife in the darkness.

**Make a Map** - using online and local resources, create a map of your house/apartment/land or even your town or state/province. Label woods, bodies of water as well as a compass on your map to help orient yourself when you look at it.

**Search for Water** - go outside and see where you can find water, is there dew on the grass, is there a puddle nearby, is there some water caught in a leaf? How many sources of water can you find?

**Life Underneath** - go outside, gently turn over a rock, stone or log, or you could dig up some leaves and see what's in there. A magnifying glass could be helpful. Be careful not to hurt or harm anything you find and always roll logs back into place.

**Look out the Window** - have a seat by the window, sketch and observe nature. This could be done on a rainy day, or if you've got nature just outside a window - could be at home, school or work.

**Change your Perspective** - try laying on the ground looking up, or lay down on your belly on the ground and nature journal from the perspective of a few inches off the ground, or staring upwards towards the sky.

**Opposite Hand** - while nature journaling, sketch with your non-dominant hand.

**“As I Sit Here...”** - writing prompt to help start the flow of writing (similar to **5 Minute Writing**)

**Draw a Heart Place** - while sitting outside in nature, recall a place where you love(d) to go. Draw that place to the best of your ability using your memory, try to capture your heart place.

**Colour Match** - take paint chips (Lowes/Home Depot) outside and try to find objects that match.

**Draw stages** - of a caterpillar or a plant while it transforms. (this is done over multiple days/weeks/even months)