



American Heart Association®

Teaching Gardens®

Grade Band

K-5

Time

30-40 minutes

to create journals

15-20 minutes

at a time to use journals in the garden

Season

Any

Location



Book construction  
indoors or outdoors;  
journaling outdoors

# Garden Journals

## Description:

In this activity, students create their own garden journals and use them to record observations in the garden through drawing, writing, and painting. Journaling brings literacy, art, and creativity into the outdoors and can be used as a one-time activity, or as an ongoing routine. You can use a variety of journal prompts (many are suggested below) to support a variety of learning goals.

## Materials:

- 8½" x 11" white cardstock or mixed-media paper, two sheets per student
- 8½" x 11" copy paper, 5 sheets per student
- Heavy-duty stapler and staples
- Watercolor paints for all students, brushes and water bowls or cups
- Pencils, colored pencils or markers

## Preparation:

- For younger students, you may want to put the journals together ahead of time. For each journal, place a sheet of cardstock on top and bottom with five pieces of copy paper inside to make a book. Staple through the front of the book near the long edge ([see illustration](#)).
- Plan classroom time to construct the journals with students if desired, and for students to personalize the covers by painting with watercolors. Plan a separate time, once journals are dry, for the first use of the journals.

### Connections to Content Standards:

Common Core English Language Arts:

#### Kindergarten:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.2 Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.

#### First Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

#### Second Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

#### Third Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

#### Fourth Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

#### Fifth Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.



# Garden Journals, *continued*

## Activity:

- 1. Make the Journals:** If you have not already put the books together, demonstrate for students how to place a sheet of cardstock on top and bottom with five pieces of copy paper inside to make a book. Staple through the students' books near the long edge (see illustration). Ask students to spread their books open flat so they can watercolor the front and back covers. Ask them to title their book on the front (for example, "Kira's Garden Journal"). Leave books spread out to dry before using.
- 2. Use the Journals:** The first time students use their journals, introduce the idea of the journal as a record of things happening in the garden. This might include observations of plants and animals, and it also might include students' own thoughts and activities. Before going to the garden, pass out the students' journals and provide pencils. Ask students to enter the date and time at the top of the first page. Before reaching the garden, set the tone for creeping into the garden quietly, in order to be able to see the most animal life; spreading out in the garden; and finding a spot to sit down to work in their journals. Let them know how much time they will have. Seven minutes can be a good start. Also let them know that you will come around with a silent "two-minute" signal (holding up two fingers) when it's time to finish up their journaling. Ask them to choose one living thing they can see from their spot, and draw or record every observation they can make about that organism. If they run out of details to observe, they can choose another living thing and continue with the same task. Before sending them out, ask students, *What are examples of living things in the garden (trees, other plants, insects, spiders, birds, lichen...)?* Set boundaries if needed, and establish an auditory signal that you will use when it's time to gather back up. When everyone knows the plan, venture out to the garden and guide students in following through with approaching quietly, spreading out, and working in their journals.
- 3. Wrap Up:** Give the two-minute signal and then the return signal, gathering students in an area (either in the garden or the classroom) where they can choose to share about what they observed. Students may write and draw more freely in their journals if they know it is their choice whether or not they will share their journal entries with the class. Ask students for ideas for journaling next time, and share a few ideas of your own, so students can look forward to more time with their journals another day.



# Garden Journals, *continued*

4. **Next Time – Ideas for Future Garden Journaling:** Following students' first journaling experience, you can revisit the journals regularly. Below are some possible prompts to choose from:

- Draw or sketch plants, animals, flowers, insects, feathers, rocks, or other things students notice in the garden.
- Record observations, such as the temperature in different locations or at different times, or the height of your pea plants each week as they grow, or the evidence of pests munching your plants.
- Record garden events, such as what the class planted, or when the first pea appeared.
- Chronicle a plant's life from seed to plant to seed again; or simply choose a plant that is already growing, and draw it as it changes.
- Write an acrostic poem about the garden.
- Write a story from the perspective of a seed, insect, or other organism in the garden.
- Find an object in the garden and use these prompts: *"I notice... I wonder... It reminds me of..."* to record everything they can about the object.
- Use your senses to explore with the following prompts: *"In the garden, I see... In the garden, I hear... In the garden, I smell.... In the garden, I feel..."*
- Draw or write a recipe for your favorite snack from the garden.
- Draw a map of the garden with all your favorite spots.
- Write a letter to a tree or other plant in the garden.
- Draw or write about what you would want to plant if you had your very own garden.

