

Seasonal Tree Journal

Designed by Kerri Rosen

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Grade Level: 2nd-6th
Season: Fall, Winter & Spring
Approximate Time: 20 minutes

Subject Area: Natural Science,
Language Arts

Educational Benefits & Standards:
Observation and tracking of natural changes; writing words, sentences, and paragraphs detailing observations, building a connection to nature.

Description

Children will sketch the changes in a tree through fall, winter, and spring in a journal, and write about their observations.

Background

There are two main types of trees, evergreen and deciduous. Evergreen trees have green leaves in every season. Deciduous trees change through the seasons. Their leaves change color and drop off in fall, their branches are bare in winter and the leaves grow back in spring. Choose a deciduous tree that your children can observe through the year.

Materials

1. Store-bought or handmade journals for recording changes
2. Pencils and colored pencils
3. Clipboard and paper for writing prompts

Set-Up

Put journals and pencils on a table where children can view the tree.

Opening Class Discussion

Ask children if they have ever noticed trees with yellow, red, and orange leaves in their yard or neighborhood. Let several children share their personal experiences. Next, explain that those trees are deciduous. Tell the children that there are two types of trees, deciduous and evergreen. Ask what they think evergreen means. Use their answers to explain the differences between the two kinds of trees.

Walk the children over to the tree that you have chosen and tell them what kind of tree it is (in our garden we chose a willow tree). Explain that they are going to make realistic drawings of the tree today and again in winter and spring to track the way it changes over time.

Activity

Give each child a journal, ask them to put their name on it, and to draw a detailed picture of the tree on the first page. Invite them to move close to the tree and notice what they see, smell, and feel. Prompt them to write words, sentences, and paragraphs to describe their drawings and observations. Suggest they add a bark or leaf rubbing on the next page in their journal.



Processing

Look at the journals with the class. Ask if any child wants to share their drawing or read what they wrote. Explain that you will store the journals and bring them out again in winter and spring so they can record how the tree changes. Ask the children to make predictions about how the tree might look in winter or spring.

Extensions & Variations

Nature journaling with children has many possibilities. Children can observe and document the changes in more than one type of deciduous tree or a garden bed through the seasons. They could capture the growth cycle in a journal by making entries after planting, harvesting, cooking, and eating food they grew in the garden.

Journals can also be used by garden teachers to track how the children change over time. For example, the children could be asked to take a few minutes at the end of every visit to draw and write about what they did that day. This type of journal provides a record of the child's interests, engagement, and development throughout the school year.

Literature Connections

Sky Tree: Seeing Science Through Art by Thomas Locker

Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf by Lois Ehlert

Crinkleroot's Guide to Knowing the Trees by Jim Arnosky

Educational Benefits & Standards

This activity is a good introduction to recording scientific observations. Some second-grade students may not be interested in drawing and writing about their observations, but by third grade, children are ready and excited to take on this challenge. Repeating this activity in winter and spring, helps children make a real connection to the cycle of seasons in nature and become more confident recording their observations. These journals will demonstrate how every child's writing and drawing increases in complexity throughout the school year.

Source Material & References

"The Seasons of a Tree" from The Growing Classroom: Garden-Based Science and Nutrition Activity Guide, 4th edition. Developed by Life Lab, lifelab.org.

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Photos from This Garden Lesson

Work sample from a 3rd-grade student.

