

Using Project Journals: Tools for creative learning



A handbook for teachers

Written and compiled by Side x Side staff and teaching artist Laurie Downey, coordinator of the Local Stories Project.

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side x side

At Side x Side, we believe in creative learning!

We support Maine teachers in the effort to weave the arts into classroom learning. This approach to teaching is called arts integration, and means teaching curricular content through an art form. By engaging in a creative process, students can demonstrate their understanding of content, learn to practice an art form, and make a meaningful product that can be shared...all in one unit! This truly experiential learning is naturally engaging for students and teachers.

Some examples:

- After studying the biology of bees, third graders create a performance where they demonstrate hive behavior, including the “dance” by which bees communicate the location of nectar.
- After learning about Portland's Great Fire of 1866 and keeping project journals, third graders create a permanent mural that combines their drawings and writing about the fire.
- Sixth graders conduct and videotape interviews of recent immigrants to Portland, then create and edit a film that highlights these stories.

This manual will provide information and guidelines for using one important arts integration tool - the project journal.



*The **Local Stories Project** is an innovative integrated arts project for public elementary schools in rural areas that combines local history research and community collaborations to develop both a permanent in-school mural and a lively theater performance. For more info: www.localstoriesproject.org.*

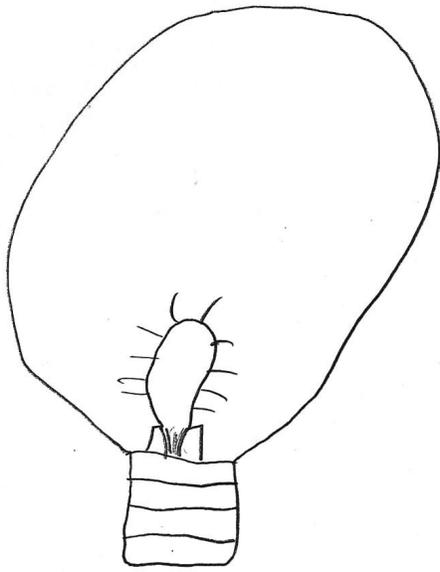


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What are project journals?

Project journals are booklets that contain notes in the form of both writing and drawing. They are tools for recording ideas and representing information, and for remembering what has been learned.



Journal from a Portland student after a trip to the Maine Historical Society

75¢/Bushel
\$8/Bushel
\$120/Bushel



10/14/14
r. Thurlow Shell fishing / clamming

Clamming is always available

Close areas so Baby clams can grow big

take about 6 months for a baby clam to grow big enough to get clammed.

3 types of clam raiser mill

the clams predators are crab, krill, sea bass

6,000 pounds of clams are sent to hospitals

Clams are #1

8

How many clam eggs are made in a year? _____

clams are born with these shells

maine memory networks

cottage industry

Clam farm

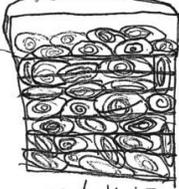
commal hole

Clotting room

Commercial street in the 1900's

Clamming

Bushel of clams

9

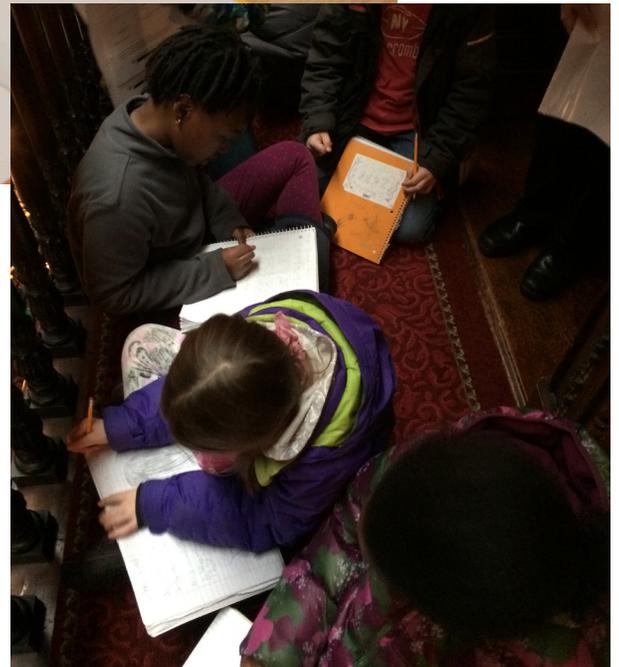
Journal spread from a student after a visit to the Scarborough Marsh

Teachers' thoughts on using journals in the classroom and remotely



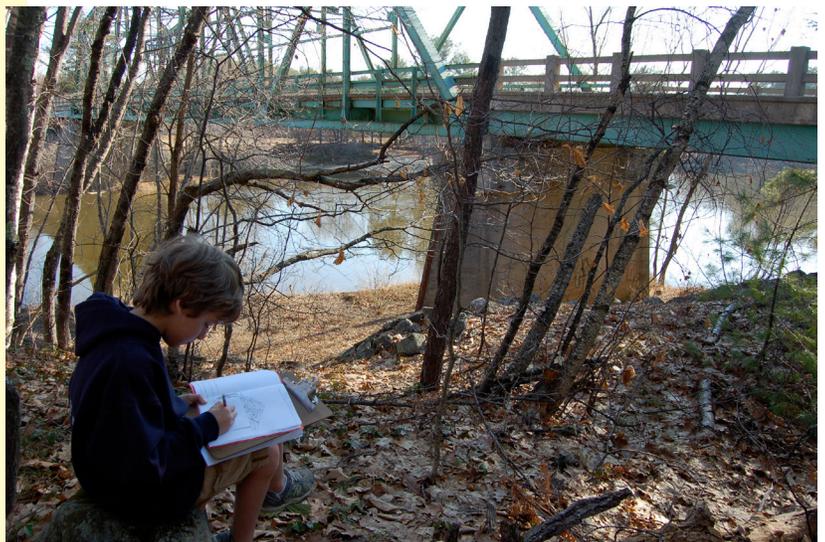
“This was truly a cross-curricular learning experience. It linked art, writing, reading, social studies, vocabulary, spelling, science, and library. Students were eager to spend more time in the research unit. My late afternoon writing class is usually a ping-pong of shushing and distracting voices. But for several afternoons my students independently wrote informational pieces for sustained periods of silence. They were vested in their learning; as one parent put it, ‘They owned it!’”

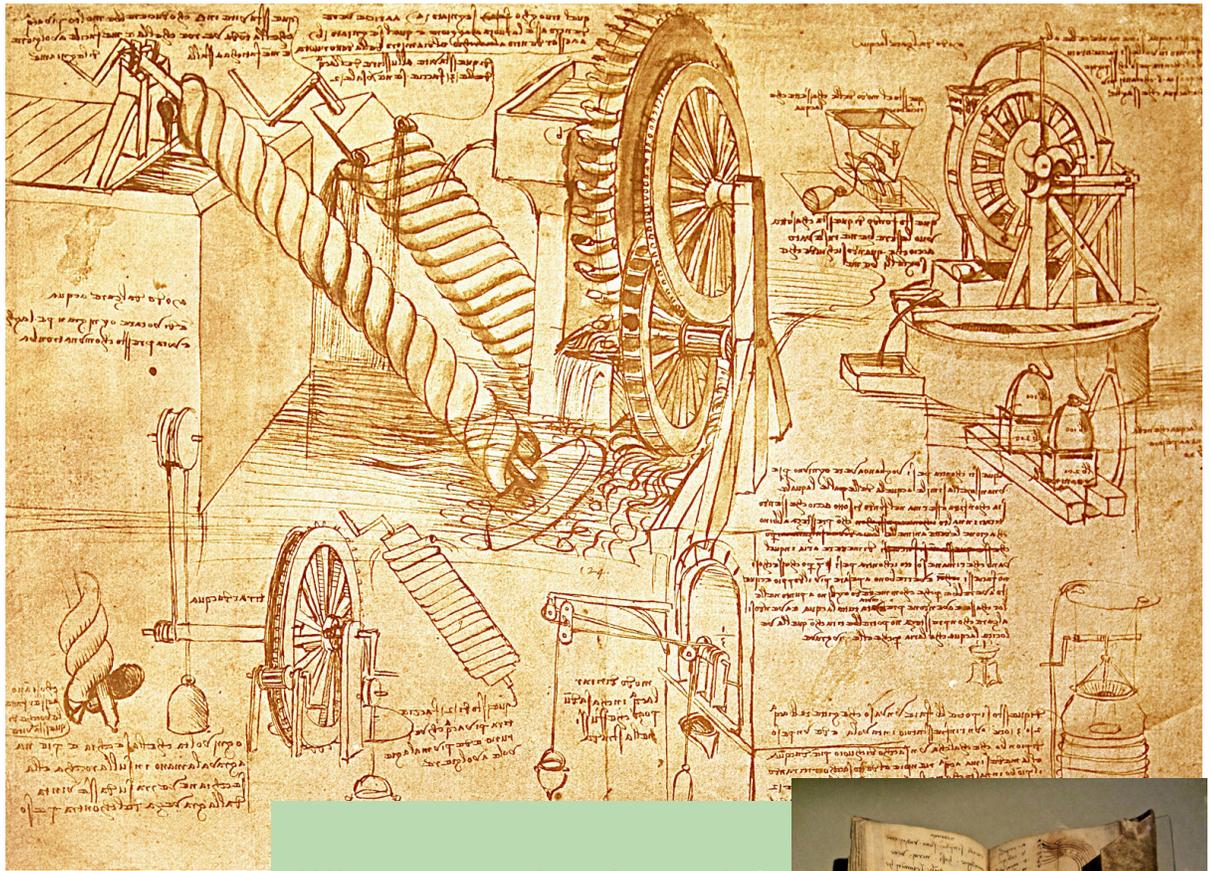
*Roberta Johnson, 3rd grade teacher
Brownfield Denmark Elementary School*



“Project journals worked really well for our remote learning this year. Many of my students’ families didn’t have easy access to digital devices, and the journal package got paper and pencil into their hands. The open-ended nature of journaling gave kids lots of choices. Project journals are a great way to get kids to think of themselves as learners; they are the way to go for remote learning!”

*Susan Salisbury, 1st grade teacher
East End Elementary School, Portland*



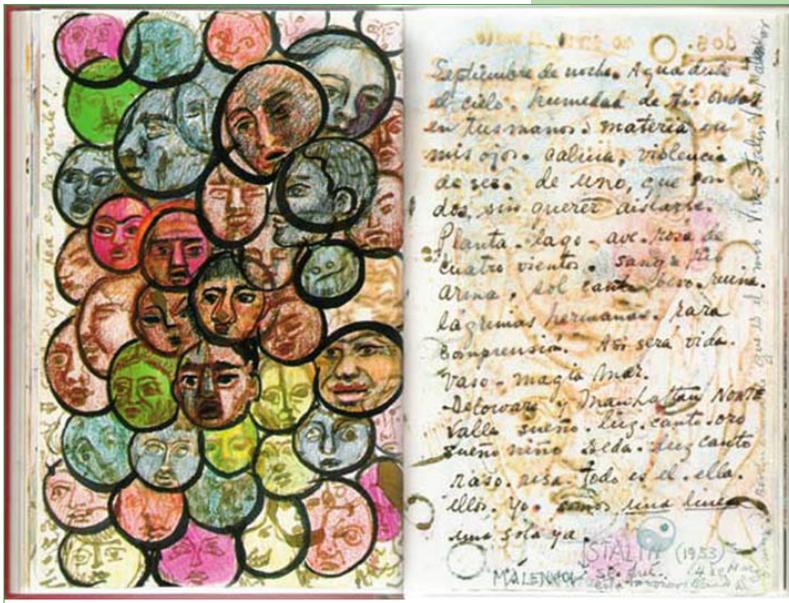


Who uses project journals?

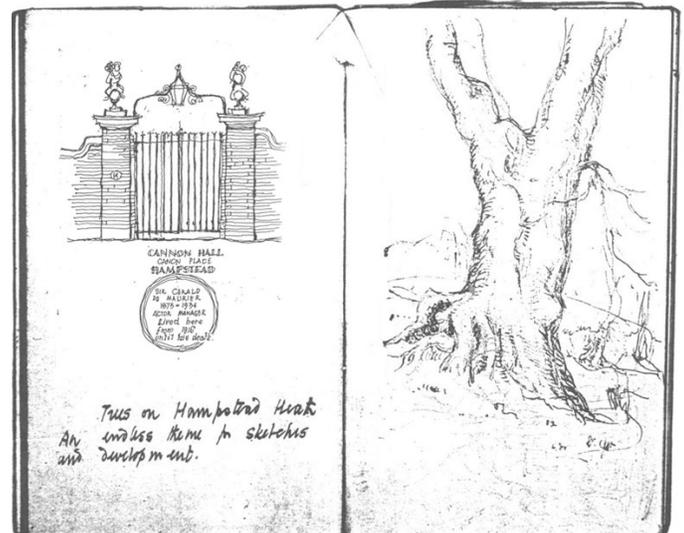
Artists, architects, scientists, inventors, designers, and many others! Journals are a handy, versatile tool whether you are a professional or a student.



Sample and page from Leonardo da Vinci's journals



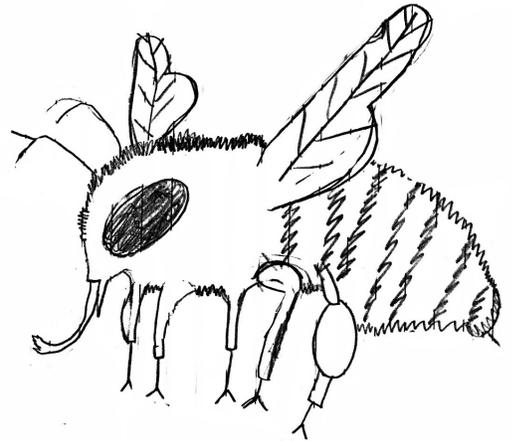
Artist Frida Kahlo's journal



British architect Denis Mason Jones



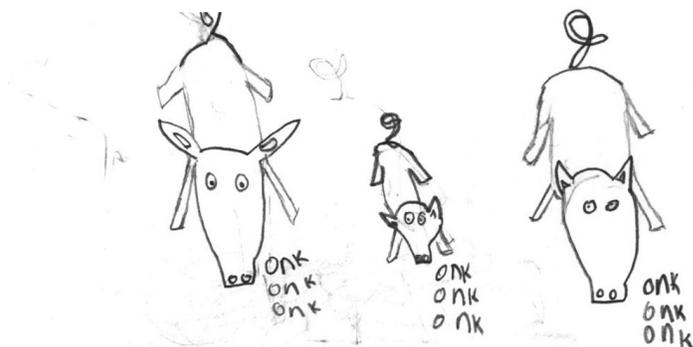
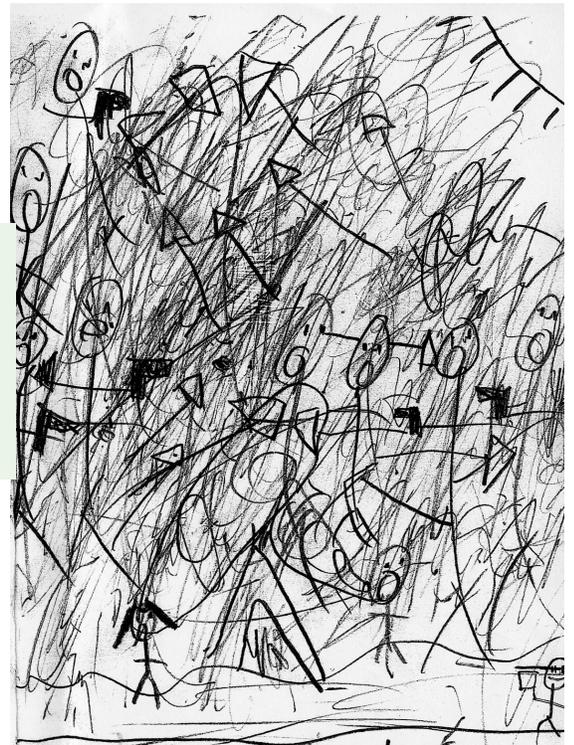
Observational drawings:
Drawn from objects or life



What kind of drawings are done in journals?



Imaginative drawings:
Creating a picture in your mind

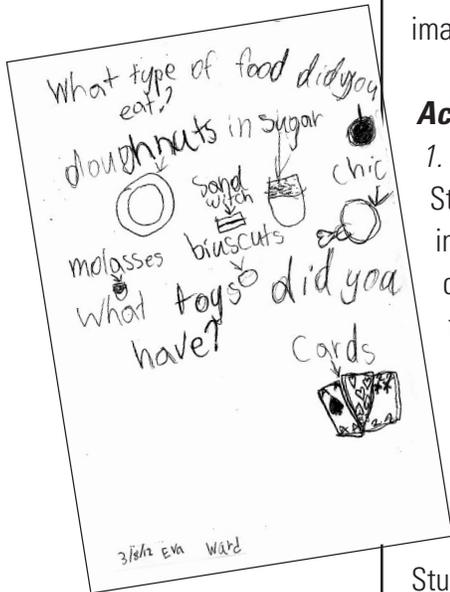


Lesson plan: **Using Project Journals**

Objective:

In this session, students will learn the basic skills of keeping a project journal by taking notes in both written and drawn form.

Students are introduced to the idea that creative people often keep journals that combine writing and sketches as a way to remember what they see, and to work out ideas. They were shown examples of the journals of several artists and designers: Leonardo da Vinci, Frida Kahlo, and architect Denis Mason Jones. We discuss the idea that drawings and notes in a journal can come from a variety of sources: memory, the imagination, and observation. Each student is given project journals to begin work in.



Activities:

1. *Taking notes on an oral story (15 minutes)*

Students are told a story about a historical event, as will happen in their re-research interviews. For example, Laurie tells a story about her grandfather and two friends coming over to the US from Norway in the 1920's, arriving on Ellis Island, and getting through customs with only \$40 between them. Students are encouraged to record the story in their journal, so they will remember it later, using either writing or drawing or both. What are the important facts to remember? What did the big ship look like?

2. *Observational drawing (15 minutes)*

Students will spend at least two minutes observing their shoe, with pencils down. They are then instructed to draw their shoe, recording as much detail as possible. Shape of the sole? Zigzag stitching? Get it down. Emphasis on getting information down, not creating a "perfect" drawing. Teachers circulate, encouraging closer looking and acknowledging effort.

At the end of each activity, students reflect on their work and their decisions about recording what they heard and saw.

Assessment:

Work in journals will provide ample evidence of student engagement and learning. Notes on the story should capture some essential elements, and the drawing of the shoe should demonstrate attention to detail.

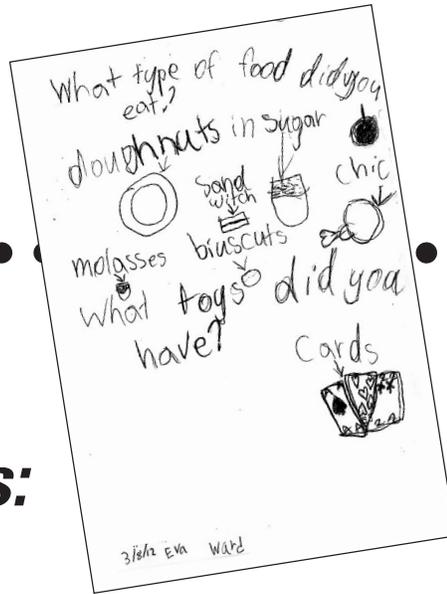
Materials:

project journals
pencils
projector and screen

Standards addressed:

CCSS SL.3.2 and 3.3, CCSS CCRA.SL.2 and CNAEA VA.1 and 3

Project journal guidelines:



1. **White paper and pencil ONLY!**
(Makes later photocopying clearer.)
2. **Use journals every time:** interviews, field trips and other research activity.
3. Take the **time: 10 minutes**/entry, encouraging focus on details, and using BOTH drawing and writing.
4. Each entry should be **labeled** with date, and interviewee's name or field trip location.
5. **"Sloppy copy"** — invented spelling and rough sketches are fine. Consider the journal as a first draft.
6. **Teachers too!**
(To be used for fact checking later, during the residency.)

Format options for journals

Journals can be made by students or teachers, or ordered pre-made, depending on budget. Pages should be blank (unlined), with a sturdy cover to protect the pages over the course of the research unit. A clipboard can also be used, if there is a good system for storing completed pages.

A good size for students is approximately 7 x 8.5 inches; this size can be easily carried on field trips.

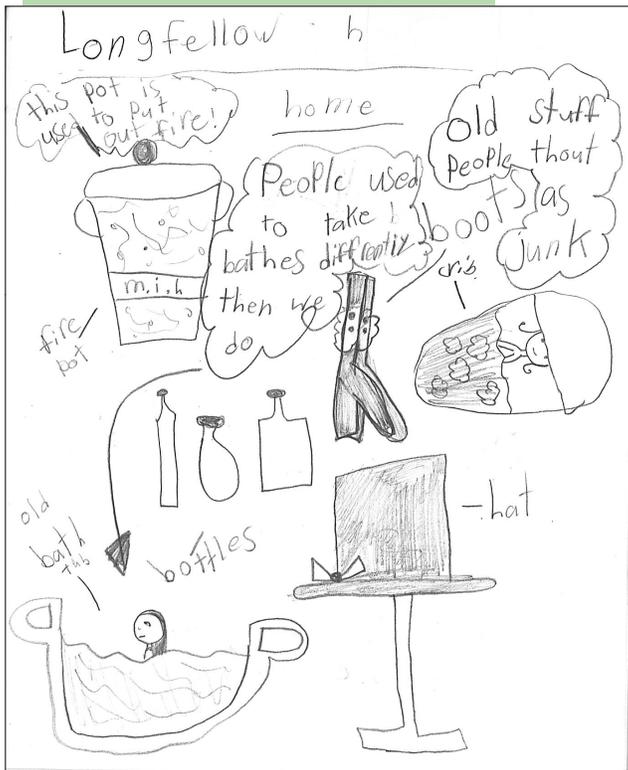
For pencils: standard #2.



handmade booklets can be sewn or staple stitched



Project journals as an assessment tool



"Towards the end of the project, we asked students to reflect and respond to prompts asking what they had learned. We gave them a booklet to write in that was about four pages long. My fourth graders looked at me like I was crazy and just about unanimously demanded more paper and more time because **there was no way one booklet and one class period would be enough time or space to record all they had learned.**"

Maire Trombley, 4th grade teacher, Wentworth Elementary School, Scarborough

*"The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer."
Eisner, 2002*

Project journals reinforce the importance of self-assessment in learning. Self-assessment is about personal meaning-making and understanding. Through self-assessment practices, students can express and demonstrate their learning, and make their thinking visible.

Project journals are a kind of portfolio that can provide a powerful lens into the learning process of the child. The completed journals provide a **formative picture of student learning over time**; this type of portfolio was termed a "process-folio" by Zessoules and Gardner (1991). Formative assessment is intended to monitor and provide ongoing feedback to improve student learning. This practice of using project journals as a formative assessment model specifically addresses Common Core state standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects for grades K-5*.

Reflection is a powerful assessment tool useful at various points throughout a project. When used at the end of a project, students can reflect on their journals and comment on the changes in their writing and drawing over time. Reflecting on the use of visuals and imagery in their project journals, students can demonstrate their learning and make their thinking visible. Reflection is an important aspect of any project as it allows for students to recognize strengths and weaknesses, as well as generate ideas and goals for future work. These reflections can then be shared with the teacher, with small groups, and/or with the whole class.

See some examples of assessment exercises on the next page!

Assessment ideas

Formative assessment project journals can be an invaluable tool for formative assessment. As the goal of formative assessment is to monitor and provide ongoing feedback to improve student learning, project journals provide an ideal format for assessing meta-cognitive awareness and growth of student thinking by “capturing individual responses and growth over time” (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011, p. 16), rather than relying on standardized assessments and traditional summative tests.

Formative assessment exercises:

1. *Gallery walk.* Have students choose a page of their journals from a specific period of study or their choice. With that journal page displayed, have students walk around and look at each journal. Students can verbalize or write feedback, praise, or give suggestions to their peers. Do this at various points throughout the projects.
2. *Small group share.* Have students share and talk about pieces of their journal with a peer. *What was challenging about the content? What they feel was a success and what they learned?* Do this at various points throughout the projects.



Self-assessment and reflection project journals include personal meaning-making and understanding. As Kerry Freedman (2003) notes, “Understanding is as much about who you are as about what you know.” When appropriate, self-reflection can also provide valuable information to both students and teachers. Reflection is a skill that, like other skills, develops over time — so students should be given frequent, even daily, opportunities to reflect on their learning.

Self-assessment and reflection exercises:

1. *Identify personal strengths.* Use writing prompts to encourage self-reflection. *How did this activity help you better understand the content? Which strategy (listening, drawing, writing) helped you the most? Explain your answer using specific examples.*
2. *Set goals and plans.* Based on self-identified strengths and weakness of a current project, have students write one or two goals they have for their next drawing or project journal assignment.
3. *Celebration of Learning.* Reflection as a summative assessment can be organized as a performance, public display, or other final event that invites students to share what they have done and learned throughout the project. Make learning a celebration!

You can use project journals...

1. As a stand-alone tool in the classroom

Teachers can use journals as an effective, dynamic way for students to both demonstrate their learning of curricular content, and to develop new skills in drawing and writing.

Important note: It is not necessary to be an artist to use project journals effectively!

The important thing is simply to encourage students in a consistent way to use both drawing and writing in their journals, to give them sufficient time to work in the journals, and to record as much detail as possible.

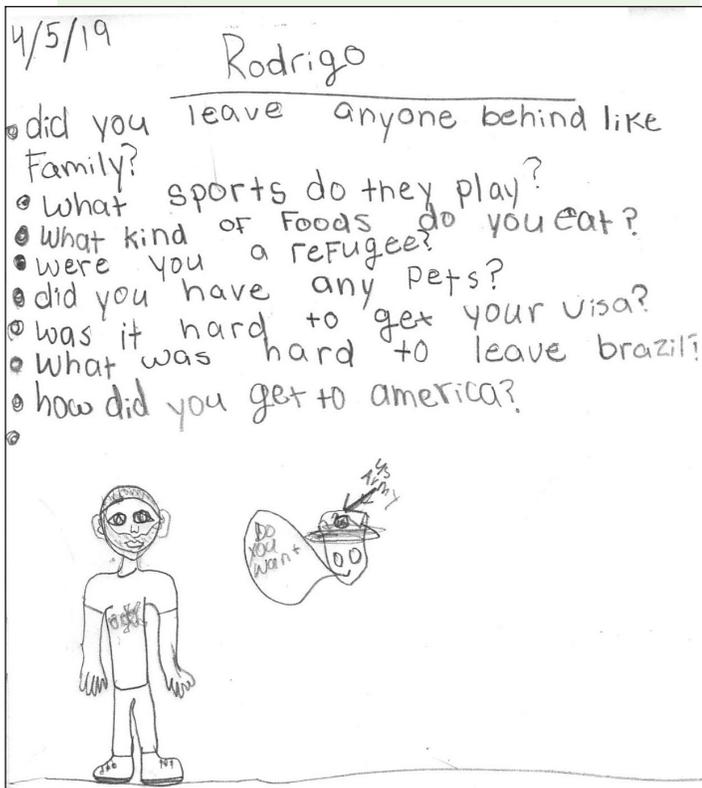
We can provide workshops to help and support teachers in using project journals in their classrooms.

2. As a resource for a final creative product

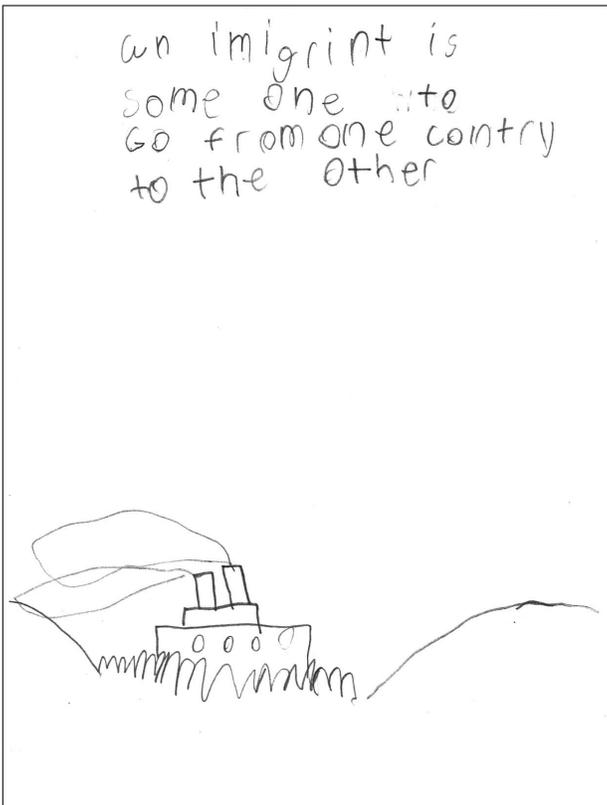
Journals can also be used as a preliminary to developing a final piece, based on the drawing and writing in the journal. Classroom teachers can collaborate with in-school specialists like art or music teachers, or bring in a teaching artist to help develop the final piece. Some possibilities:

- poster
- mural
- performance
- musical piece
- website

We can help connect teachers to teaching artists and assist in setting up projects.



Bibliography and resources



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Arts Education Partnership. "Preparing Students for the Next America: The Benefits of an Arts Education." April, 2013.

<https://www.giarts.org/sites/default/files/Preparing-Students-for-the-Next-America.pdf>

(This helpful pdf has many resources and citations listed.)