

Using Project Journals: Tools for Creative Learning Version 2 / 2021

Owl Observations

ears not at same level



A handbook for teachers

Written and compiled by Side x Side staff
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Local Stories Project

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Department of Education Assistance for Arts Education
Development and Dissemination (AAEDD) Grant and the
LilySarahGrace Fund.*

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 it 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.

Project journals can be used as a stand-alone integrated art unit, or as preliminary to a more extended piece such as a mural, an illustrated book, or a large collage. In this handbook, we'll give you some classroom ready examples of lessons using project journals and potential extensions, in the hopes that it will inspire your own projects in the classroom.

Give project journals a try! You may find they become handy tools to use again and again.



*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.*
www.localstoriesproject.org

The logo for 'Side x Side' consists of the text 'sidexside' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are colored in a gradient: 's' is orange, 'i' is light blue, 'd' is orange, 'e' is light blue, 'x' is orange, 's' is light blue, 'i' is orange, and 'd' is light blue. The logo is set against a white background.

***Side x Side** is a local non-profit that ignites academic excellence in education through comprehensive arts-based programs, bringing critical thinking, creativity, and innovation into the classroom. Side x Side integrates science, technology, math, literacy, and the humanities with the arts to enhance school curriculum.*
www.sidexsideme.com

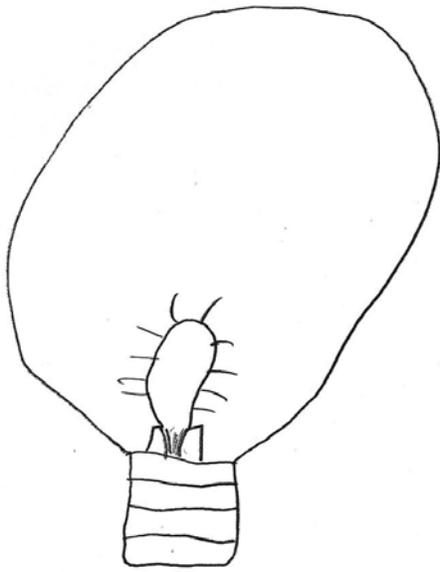


Table of contents

What are project journals ?	4
Teachers on the benefits of journaling	5
Why combine writing and drawing ?	6
Who uses project journals?	7
What kinds of drawings are used in project journals?	8
Project journal guidelines	9
Format options for journals	10
Ways to use project journals – standalone vs research for final project	11
Journals as assessment tools	12
Sample lesson plans	14
Bibliography and resources	20

Side x Side’s arts integration programs engage students in creative learning by connecting art making with core classroom content. Students gain agency by linking personal expression, voice, and relevant interests to their classroom experiences. Side x Side collaborates with local experts, teaching artists, school communities, and the University of Southern Maine to build connections through hands-on arts learning. Our model strengthens social-emotional skills and supports more inclusive classrooms by providing equitable opportunities for demonstrating and expressing knowledge, collaboration, and community building.

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 / Claming

Claming is always available

Close areas Clams. 6,000 pounds of are send to hospitals

so Baby clams can grow big

It will take about 6 months for a baby clam to grow big enough to let clamed.

3 types of clames raiser mill (net)

Clams are #1

* the clams predators crab krill sea bass

8

How many clam eggs are made in a year?

clams are born with there shells

maine memory networks

* cottage industry

* Clam farm

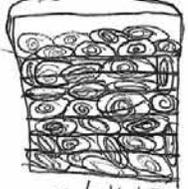
* Cammal hole

* Clotting room

* Commercial street in the 1900's

Clamming

Bushel of clams

9

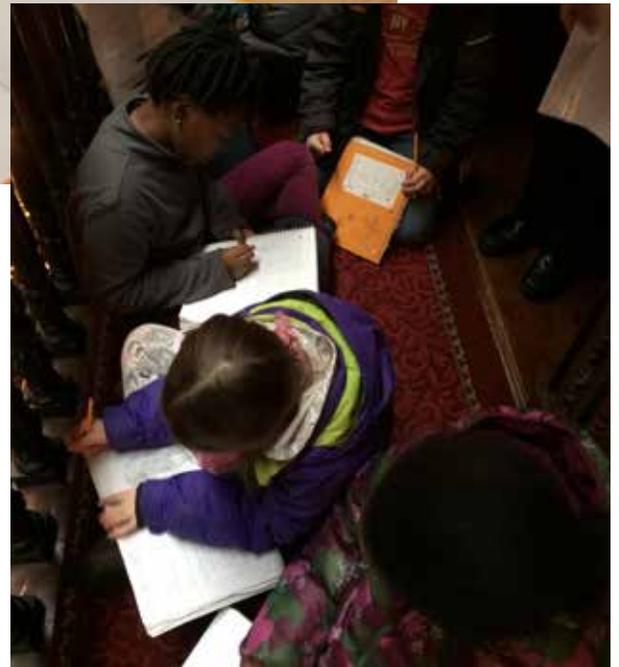
Journal spread from a student after a visit to the Scarborough Marsh

Teachers' thoughts on using journals in the classroom and remotely



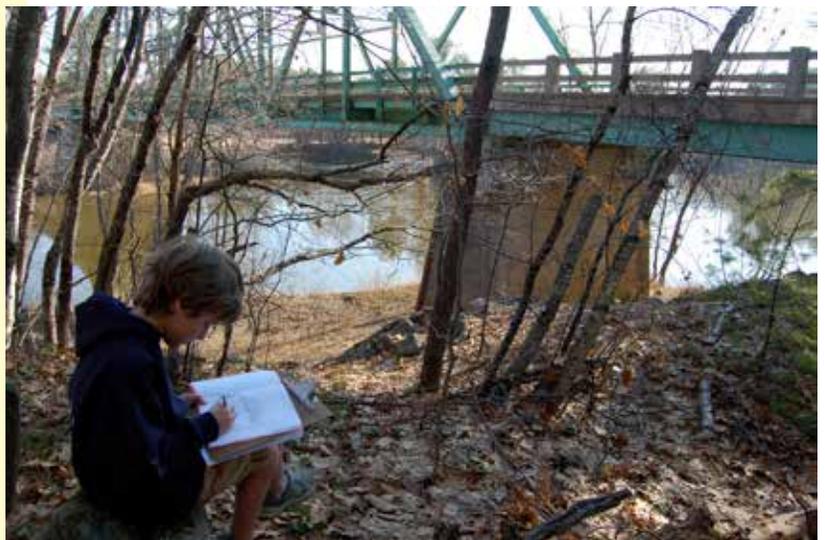
“This was truly a cross-curricular learning experience. It linked art, writing, reading, social studies, vocabulary, spelling, science, and library. Students were eager to spend more time in the research unit. My late-afternoon writing class is usually a ping-pong of shushing and distracting voices. 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*

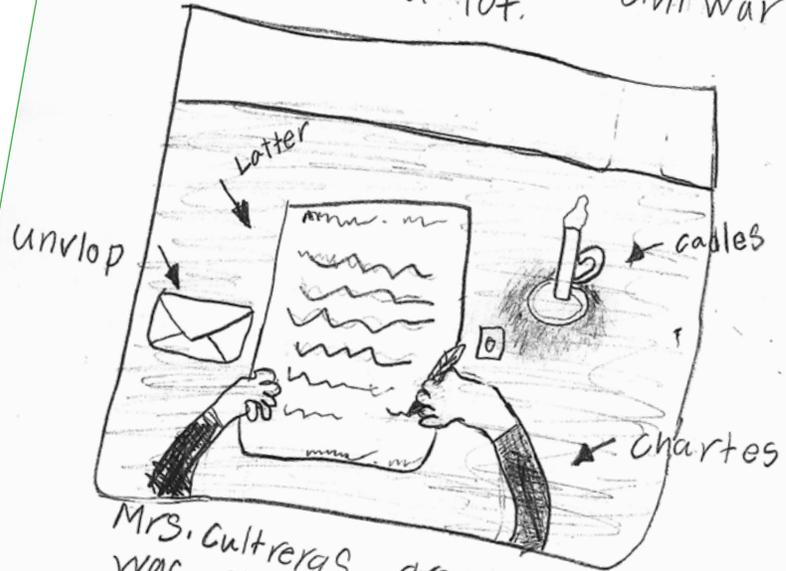


Why combine writing and drawing?

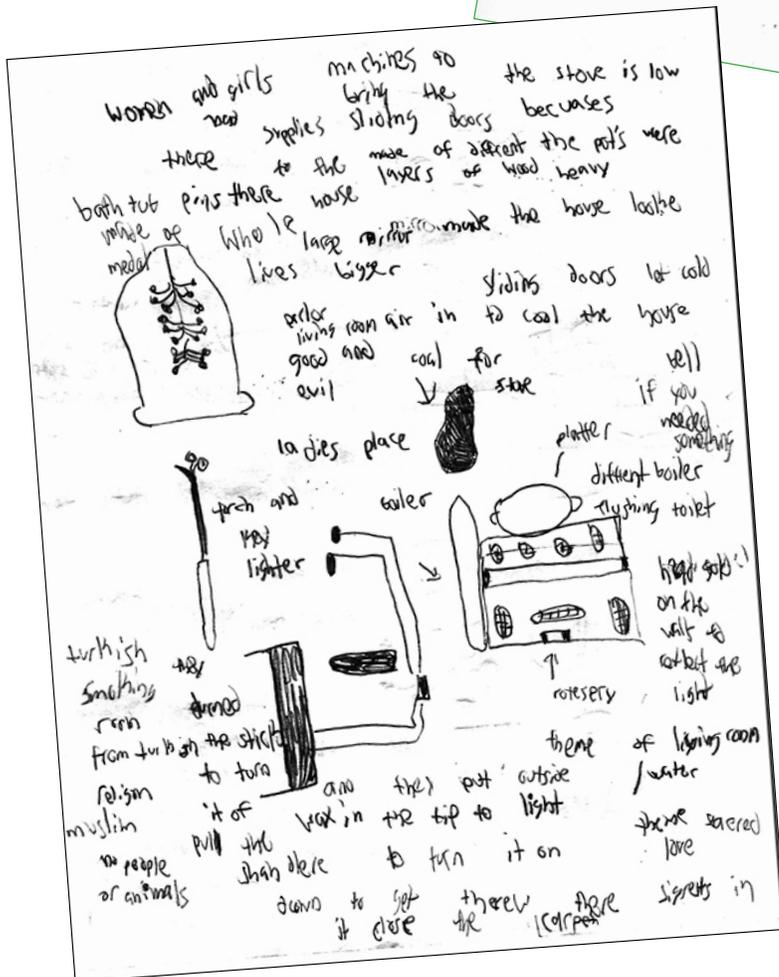
Drawing helps students remember better than reading or writing alone because it requires the processing of information on several levels. Researchers Fernances, Wammes, and Meade found that drawing boosts memory, nearly doubling recall.

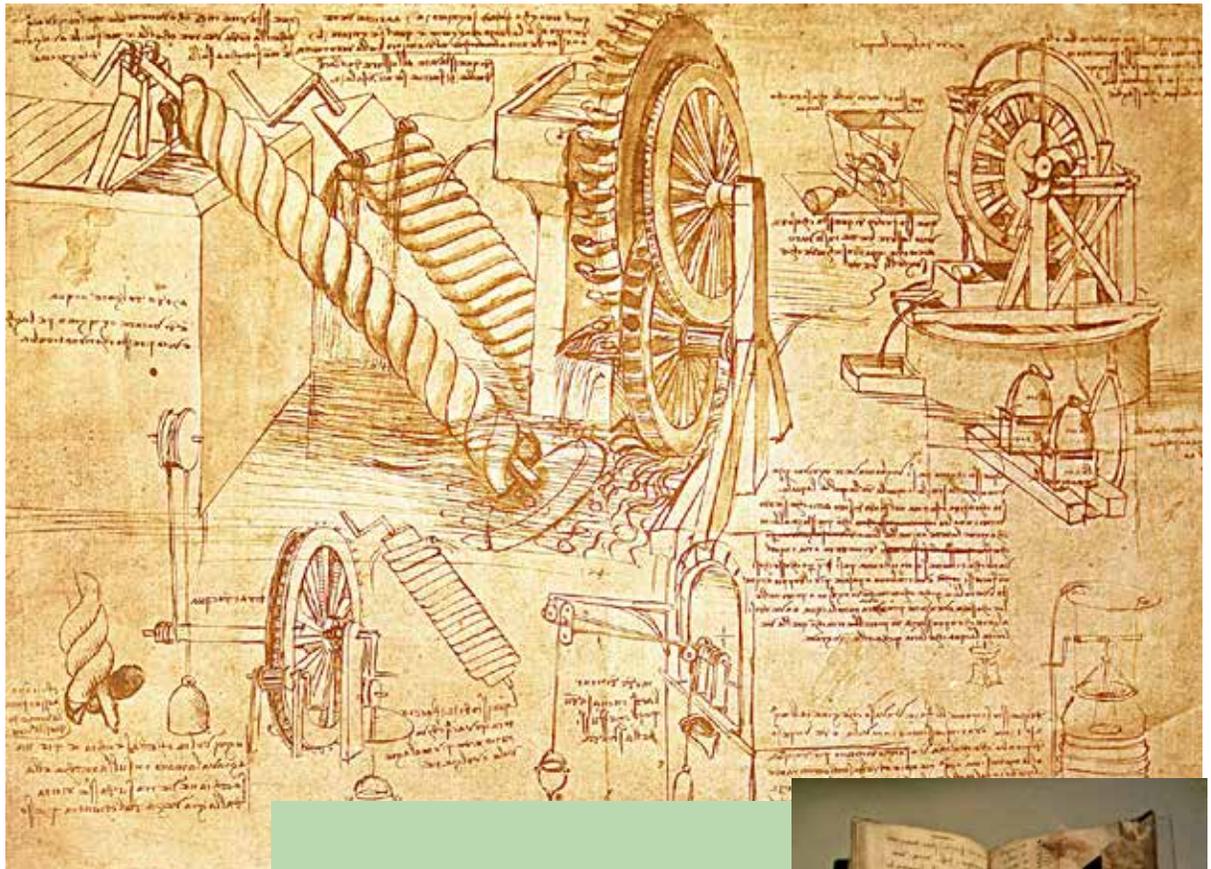
By combining writing and drawing, students are given choices that enable them to play to their strengths, which allows for learning on even more levels. This can be valuable for all students, and particularly those who face linguistic challenges (ELL, dyslexia, etc.).

Mar. 16: 2017
Mrs. Cultrera came today
we learned about the civil war
we learned a lot.



Mrs. Cultreras great grandfather
was Charles Baker wrote Letters
to his mother and this is
Charles Was in the union



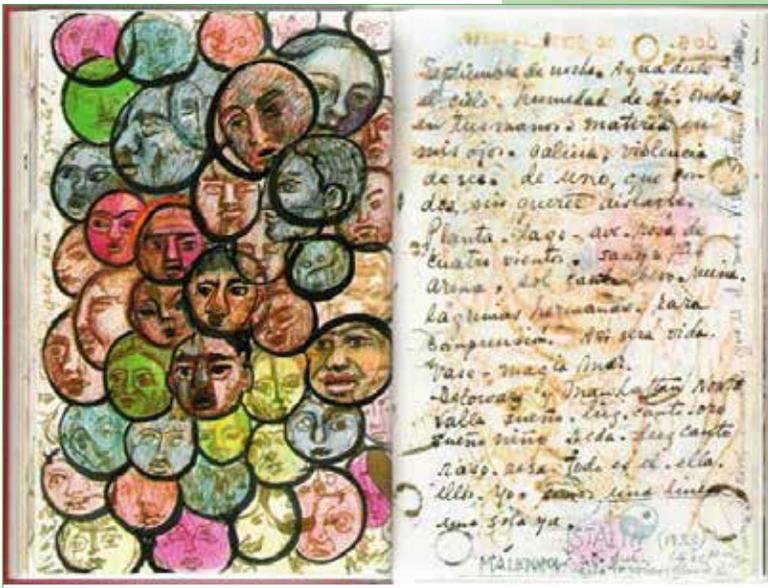


Who uses project journals?

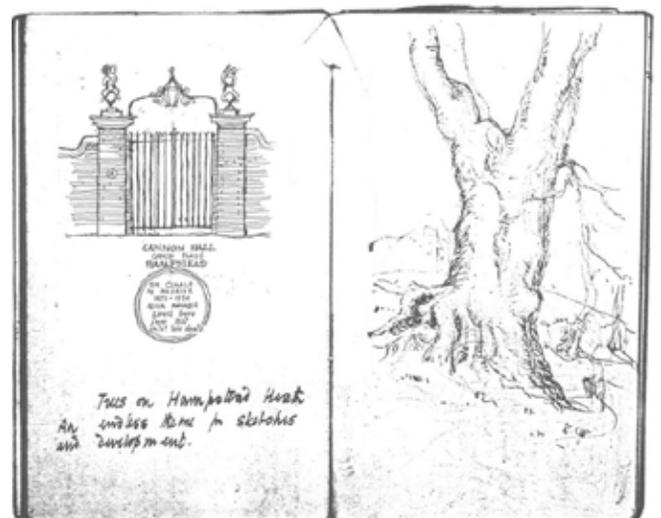
Artists, architects, scientists, inventors, designers, and many others! Journals are a handy, versatile tool whether you are a professional or a student.



Sample page from Leonardo da Vinci's journals



Artist Frida Kahlo's journal



British architect Denis Mason Jones



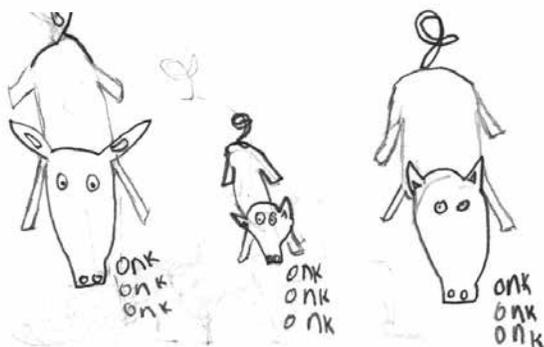
Observational drawings:
Drawn from objects or life



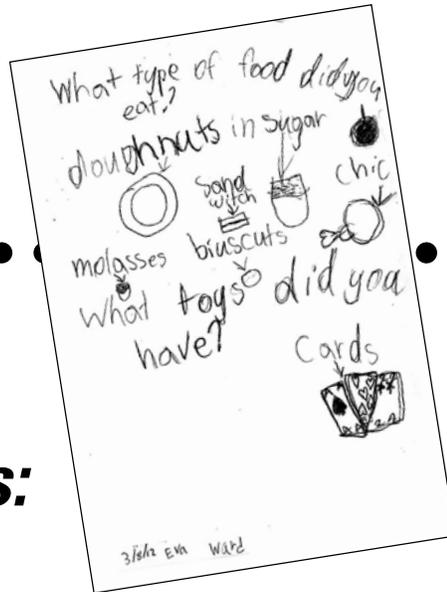
What kind of drawings are done in journals?



Imaginative drawings:
Creating a picture in your mind



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 to be 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



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.

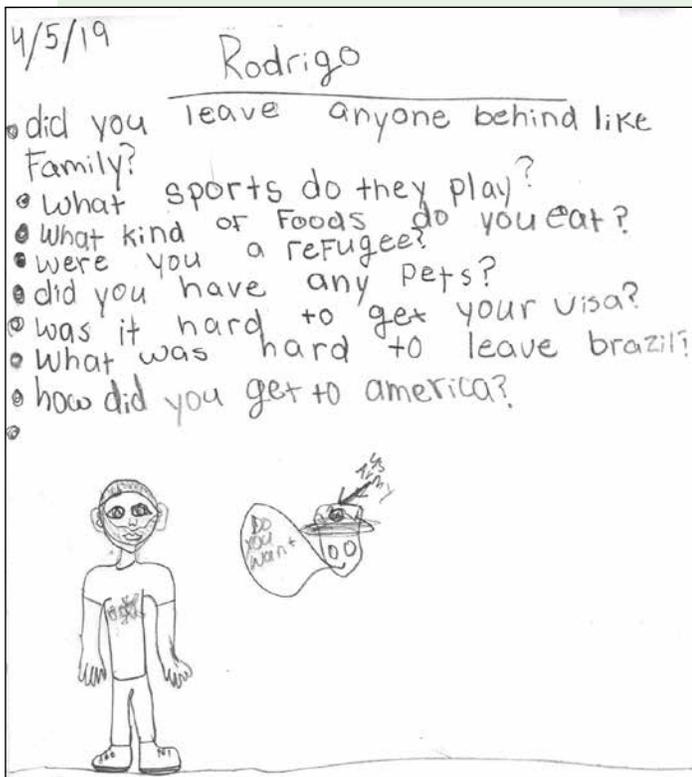
We can provide workshops to help and support teachers in using project journals in their classrooms.

2. As a resource for a final creative product

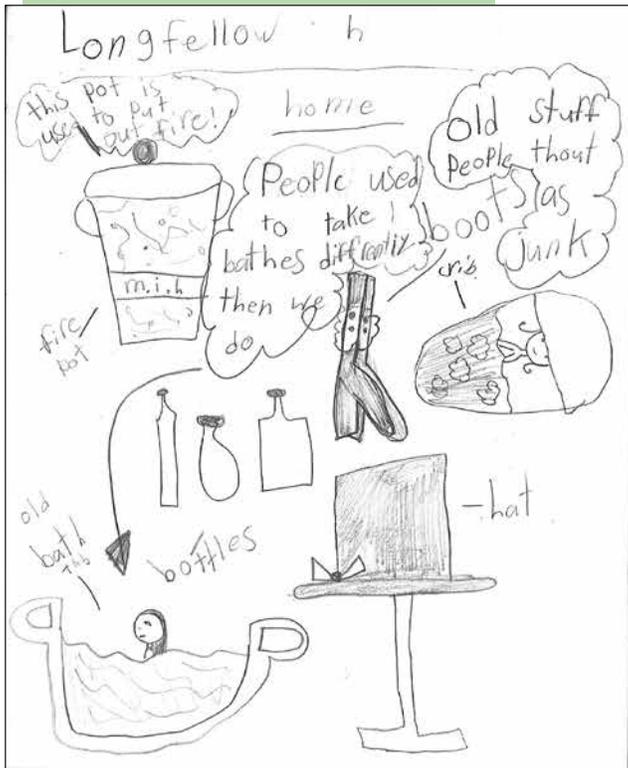
Journals can also be used as a preliminary to developing a final piece, based on the drawing and writing in the journal. Classroom teachers can collaborate with in-school specialists like art or music teachers, or bring in a teaching artist to help develop the final piece. Some possibilities:

- poster
- mural
- performance
- musical piece
- website

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



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!

Working with project journals facilitates the fulfillment of the guiding principles of Common Core standards, especially:

Clear and Effective Communicator:

Students research and use background knowledge to give audiovisual presentations about current and historical issues.

Self-Directed and Lifelong Learner:

Students generate questions and explore primary and secondary sources to answer those questions while demonstrating a growth mindset.

Creative and Practical Problem Solver:

Students draw conclusions about current and historical problems using valid research and critical thinking.



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.

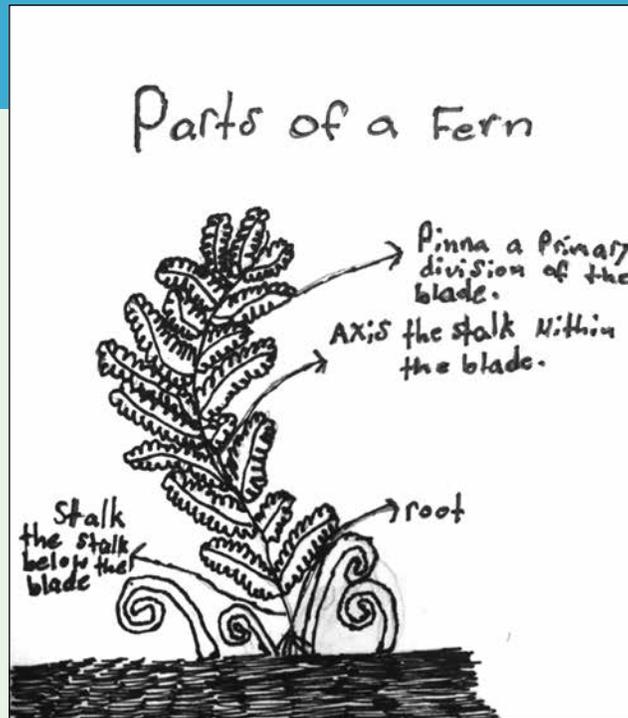
Self-assessment and reflection project journals include personal meaning-making and understanding. As Kerry Freedman (2003) notes, “Understanding is as much about who you are as about what you know.” When appropriate, self-reflection can also provide valuable information to both students and teachers. 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!

Using Project Journals:

Sample lesson plans



This section offers just a few project journal ideas that can be integrated into existing lessons and units...or you can use them as new stand-alone exercises in your classrooms! All the lessons have extension ideas with links to further resources on the Side x Side Teacher Portal. All lessons and extension activities can be adapted to work with multiple grade levels and content areas.

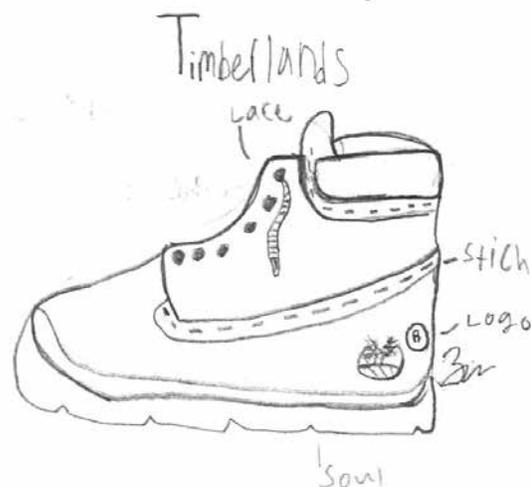
Observational Drawing: Draw Your Shoe!

This simple, stand-alone 15-minute exercise encourages students to observe carefully and draw what they see.

Age level: all grades



1. Get your journal and a pencil, put the date on top of a blank page.
2. Take off one shoe and put it on the desk or table in front of you.
3. Just LOOK at your shoe for a full 2 minutes, no drawing. (Time yourself.) Observe all the details — lacing, patterns, colors, shape of sole.
4. Now draw your shoe — either the whole shoe or part of it. Put in as much detail as you can! (Optional: use colored pencils to put in color.)
5. Near the drawing, write some notes: what did you notice about your shoe when drawing that you hadn't noticed before? Share your work with another student and talk about it together.



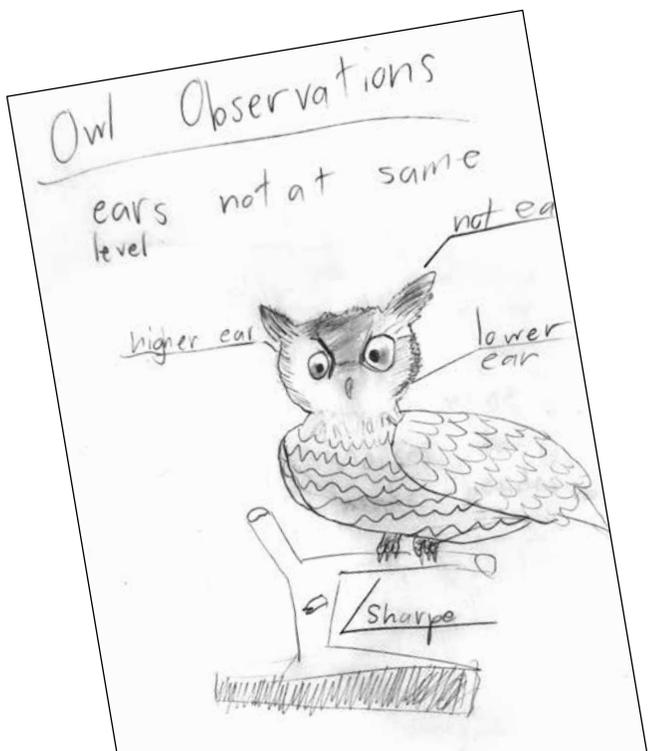
Observational Drawing and Notetaking: Owls, owls, owls

This science unit with a 4th grade class involved students researching owls through expedition to a park near the school, where they made observational notes and sketches about the habitat and whatever they observed. They also sketched the owls live via a zoom with the Center for Wildlife in Cape Neddick. They even printed 3D owl skulls and dissected owl pellets! The project journals provided a kind of field journal for students to keep drawings and notes on what they were learning. The journals then could be used as a resource for creating an art piece, in this case a colorful watercolor and crayon resist single sheet book.

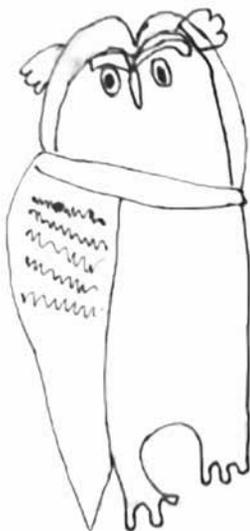
Age level: grades 3-8

Optional extension: Bookmaking

(go to [Teacher Portal on Side x Side website](#))



Notice	Wonder
I notice that the owl waits a little in till it catches its prey	I wonder if the only thing mice
I notice that the owl did not chew he only swallowed the mouse	I wonder if why owls sit on a dead tree
I notice the owl moved a step to get closer to its prey	I wonder if the owl eats fish
I notice the owl sat on a dead tree and waited for its prey	



1. Get your journal and a pencil, put the date on top of a blank page and name of owl you are studying.
2. Just LOOK at the owl for a full 2 minutes, no drawing. (Time yourself.) Observe all the details — shape of head, body and feet, colors and patterns of feathers.
3. Now draw your owl — either the whole owl or one part of it. Put in as much detail as you can! (Optional: use colored pencils to put in color.)
4. Near the drawing, write some notes. Why are the feet and claws shaped the way they are? Why are the eyes so big? Share your work with another student.

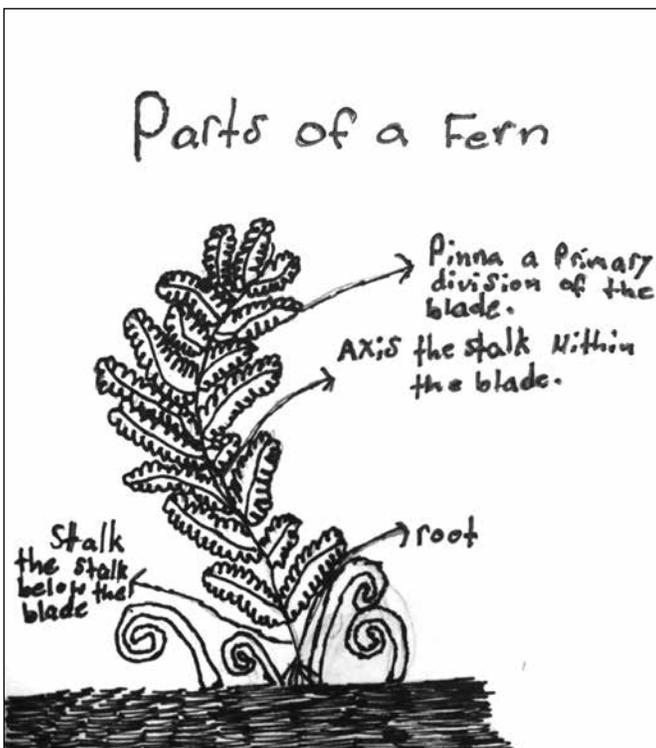
Botanical illustration: Native Maine Plants

Students in this 4th grade class used actual plants and illustrations as references to create these detailed drawings of Maine native plants. By working in black and white, students were able to focus on the shapes and details of the plants' morphology. (This lesson can be done in the classroom, or on a field trip.)

Age level: grades 3-8

Optional extension: Printmaking

(go to Teacher Portal on Side x Side website)



1. Get your journal and a pencil, put the date on top of a blank page, and name of plant.
2. Position yourself and/or the plant so that you can see all parts of it very clearly.
3. Just LOOK at the plant for a full 2 minutes, no drawing. (Time yourself.) Observe all the details — stems, shape of leaves, vein patterns.
4. Now draw your plant — either the whole plant or part of it. Put in as much detail as you can! (Optional: use colored pencils to put in color.)
5. Near the drawing, write some notes: what did you notice about your plant when drawing that you hadn't noticed before? What colors do you see? Share your work with another student and talk about it together.

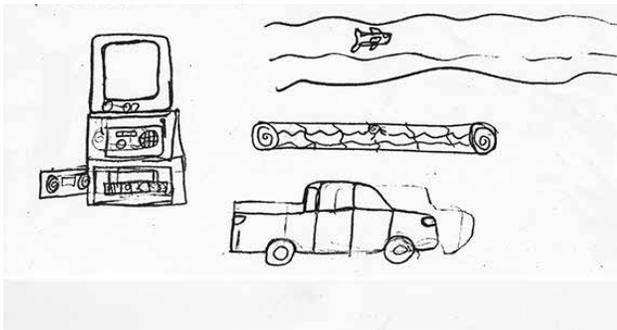
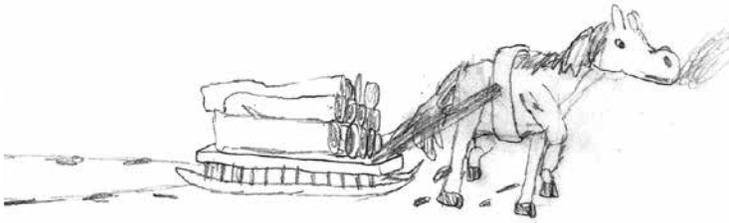
Interviews with elders: Stories from Charlotte

At this small, multi-age school, students from pre-K to 8th grade researched their town's history by conducting interviews and going on field trips. Students heard stories about the farming life, including hauling wood by horse and wagon. They took notes and made drawings in project journals, then worked together to craft a mural and a performance at the neighboring arts center.

Age level: grades preK-8

Optional extension: Performance

(go to Teacher Portal on Side x Side website)



1. Get your journal and a pencil, put the date on top of a blank page and name of interviewee.
2. Listen carefully to the stories told by the person you are interviewing. Ask questions for more details, and to clarify the stories!
3. Take notes as you listen, by drawing and writing. If the story brings a picture to your mind, sketch it in your journal ("memory drawings").
4. Take written notes for important facts and ideas that are hard to draw: dates, numbers, names.
5. If the interviewee brings objects and photos in to show the class, do sketches during the interview. The teacher can also take photos of the objects for close looking so that students can continue to complete drawings and add more details after the interviews are over.

Exploring food sources: Field trip to a farm

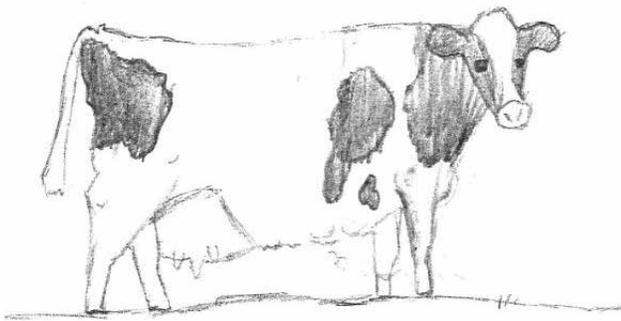
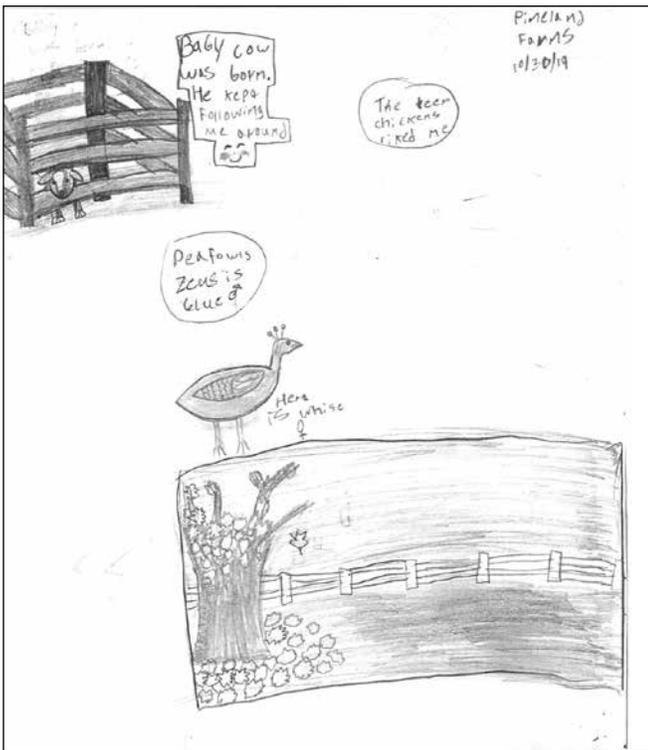
In this project-based unit, 7th grade students spent months researching the four food “pathways.” One activity was a field trip to a local Maine farm where they gathered eggs and saw a calf being born. Throughout, they kept notes and drawings in their project journals. These drawings and notes were then used as the basis for a permanent mural for the school cafeteria.

Age level: grades 7-8

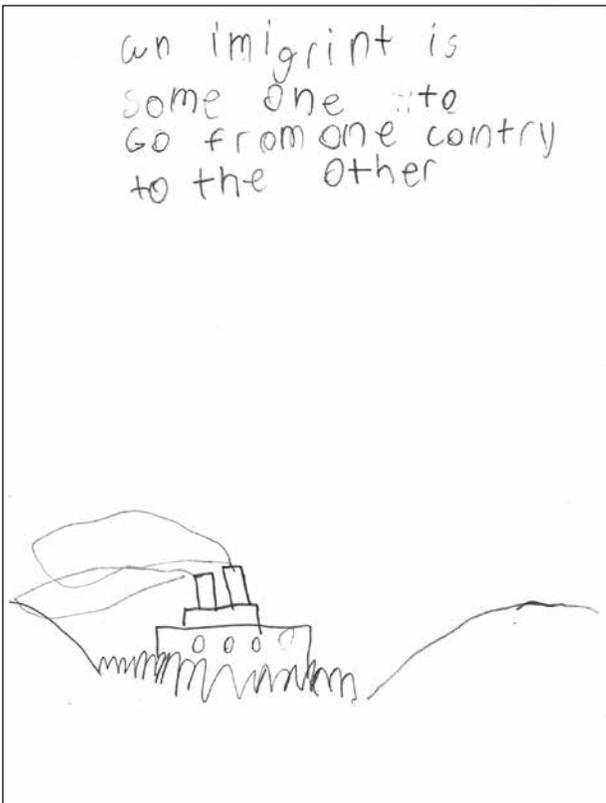
Optional extension: Mural

(go to Teacher Portal on Side x Side website)

- 1.** Get your journal and a pencil, put the date on top of a blank page and location of field trip or presentation.
- 2.** Find one subject to focus on that you find interesting. For example, if you are in a dairy barn, locate one cow to observe and draw.
- 3.** Spend several minutes just observing. What shapes do you see that make up the cow’s body, what patterns of color? What are the sounds the cow makes?
- 4.** Now spend 10-15 minutes drawing and making notes. Put in as much detail as you can!
- 5.** Near the drawing, write some notes: what did you notice that is better to describe in words — sounds, behavior, information, etc.? If possible, spend time later in the classroom finishing drawings and notes.



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General reading on arts integrated learning:

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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.)

For more information on **comprehensive arts integration unit plans**, please visit www.sidexsideme.com/for-teachers/. For examples of **Local Stories Projects** in Maine schools, please visit www.localstoriesproject.org/projects