



Launching young readers!

Reading Rockets

Literacy in the Sciences: Activity No. 6
Recording Observations: Journals and Field Notes
By: Reading Rockets

Science and math explorations provide your growing reader with a chance to strengthen observational and record-keeping skills by keeping a special journal to fill with sketches, notes, and graphs. Try these ideas to get your child started.

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Science and math explorations provide your growing reader with a chance to record all kinds of observations. Young children love to keep a special journal, and fill it with all sorts of drawings, scribbles, sketches, notes, and graphs. Try to date each entry and watch as your child's observational and recording skills grow along with your child.

Create a special journal

Use any paper for the cover: cardstock, interesting cardboard and pretty greeting cards can all be used as a cover. Then, collect some twigs from the backyard and find a large, thick rubber band. Fold your cover in half. Fold your inside pages, and put them inside the cover. Trim as needed. Punch two holes with a hole punch, measuring down from the top and up from the bottom about 2 inches. Pull one end of the rubber band through the bottom hole and slide twig into the loop. Pull the other end of the rubber band through the top hole and slide the other end of twig through that. You now have a special journal into which your budding scientist can record observations.

A scientist's field notes

Begin using the science journal by taking your child outside. Encourage your child to write down what she observes about her surroundings, looking at both the big picture and the small, examining plants and rocks and insects up close. Have her make a record in their journal of what they experience with each of their senses. Then have her choose one animal or plant to watch for 10 minutes.

Your child can choose anything: a dandelion, a grasshopper, a bird soaring overhead. Ask her to describe it as clearly as they can, as if she is writing for someone who's never seen that before. Have her watch for movements and take note of any sounds made. Ask your child to draw and label a picture of the plant or animal.

Other fun ideas to record in your field journal

A flower tally

Count the flowers in an area in the spring once a week for three weeks. Compare your tallies. Your child will have fun watching the numbers go up as flowers bloom in the spring.

Ant watching

There are ants everywhere! Try following them to their home and see what they're up to. Where do they live? How many can you count in one place? Record these observations and your ant grand total.

Dig a hole

As parents know, dirt can be pretty interesting to kids. Have your child dig a hole and notice how the dirt changes as he digs deeper. Can he describe the different layers? What creatures did he find as he dug? Record these and other interesting findings in the journal.

Nature scavenger hunt

Use your notebook to make (or draw) a list of some common things and a few rare ones that can be found outside near your home or in a park. Include things like: acorn, pine cone, flat rock, bird feather, weed, flower. Hand your child the notebook and let the scavenger hunt begin!

Special thanks to the [Two Writing](http://www.twowritingteachers.wordpress.com)

[Teachers](http://www.twowritingteachers.wordpress.com) for their field journal directions, and [Nature Rocks](http://www.naturerocks.org) for the nature-based ideas for family fun.

Recommended children's books



<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0967245915/readingrocket-20>

My Nature Journal: A Personal Nature Guide for Young People

By Adrienne Olmstead

This spiral-bound book is designed to take into the field, as kids explore woods, meadows, ponds, streams, and other habitats. The design of the book encourages children to observe, sketch, count, reflect, and write about nature. (Ages 8-12)

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Nature Log Kids: A Kid's Journal to Record Their Birding Experiences

By DeAnna Brandt

Birds are everywhere — even the most urban neighborhood is a good place to look for birds and study their habits. This journal includes questions to prompt thinking and provides pages to write down observations, paste in photos, or add drawings. Also in the series: [Nature Log Kids: A Kid's Journal to Record Their Nature Experiences](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1885061544/readingrocket-20)(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1885061544/readingrocket-20>). (Ages 4-8)

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Saguaro Moon: A Desert Journal

By Kristin Joy Pratt-Serafini

A young girl explores Arizona's Sonoran Desert, recording her thoughts, scientific facts, questions, and experiences in a nature journal decorated by her paintings of the native plants and animals. This book is a great way to introduce kids to scientific journals and

the importance of close observation. (Ages 4-8)

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What Darwin Saw: The Journey That Changed the World
By Rosalyn Schanzer

Here's a chance to peek into the journals and letters of Charles Darwin, written during his famous voyage of the *Beagle*. Readers get the chance to listen to Darwin's voice and eavesdrop on his observations in this lushly illustrated retelling of his life and work. (Ages 6-12)

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Reading Rockets is a national multimedia project that offers a wealth of research-based reading strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help young children learn how to read and read better. Our reading resources assist parents, teachers, and other educators in helping struggling readers build fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

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"You may have tangible wealth untold. Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold. Richer than I you can never be — I had a mother who read to me." — Strickland Gillilan