



Letters to Nature Kids

August, 2022 ∞ Number 7

Dear Nature Kids,

I went to the Big Thicket last year, and I remember a lot about this wonderful trip. I remember that first night searching shrubs and trees for treefrogs, while surrounded by the calls of the frogs. I remember sitting on a bridge and looking into water that was like a mirror, reflecting the forest around us. One of the reasons I remember these things so well is that after each part of my visit, I wrote about it.

Writing or drawing helps us really notice and think about things. If I see a graceful little fish that I want to draw, I'm going to look at it—and keep looking at it a lot so that I know how to draw it. By the time I'm done I will have learned a lot about that fish. I'll know about its fins and how big they are, and the shape of its head and mouth and other things, too

Writing and drawing is really telling the story of your outing in nature. You tell the story of what you saw, heard, and felt that day. The pictures

and words go together to tell the story of your day as you draw and write *nature notes*. Usually you keep such notes in a **nature journal**.

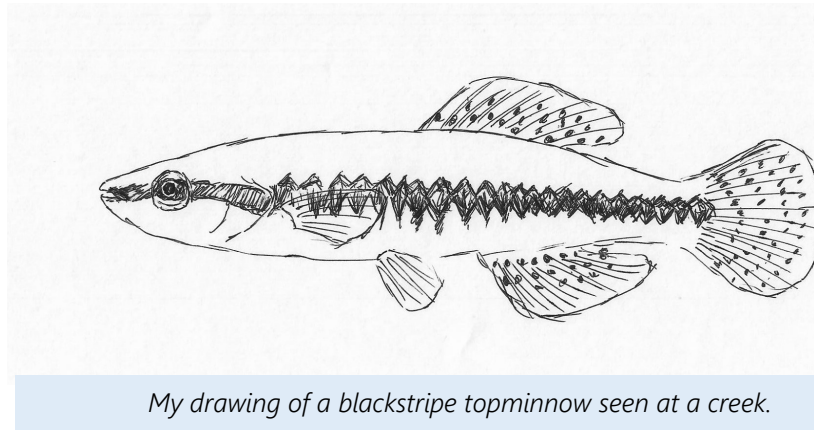
The journal could be a spiral notebook, pages that you put into a binder, or anything else that you can take with you while you are on the trail. You could pull it out of your backpack or your back pocket, sit down for a bit and tell your story.

"We saw ducks and turtles, and a big bird with a long neck and long legs!" That's a great part of a cool story. And there's even more to tell. The story starts with when it happened and what kind of day it was:

*"August 23rd, 2022. It's still **summer**! But not as hot today—the weather report said it was going to be in the 90s."*

That's a nice start to the story, telling the day and the season, along with a little bit about the weather. You can almost see and feel the bright sunshine and all that warmth of a late summer day!

∞ *continued on the next page*



My drawing of a blackstripe topminnow seen at a creek.

"We went to Fort Worth Nature Center in the morning, to go sit on the boardwalk over the marsh." Now we know where you went, and we're ready to hear about the turtles, ducks, and that big bird—maybe a great blue heron.

Now you can draw, you can tell more about what you heard, how everything looked, and even the smells you noticed. As much or as little as you like.

It's really important that you remember that it's *not* homework and you will *not* be graded. If you're not too sure about your drawing, or you think you might misspell some words, give it a try anyway. Because it can be fun right from the start, and the more you practice, the better you get at it. Here's what is important: **that you enjoy telling the story** and **that it helps you remember the story**.

Something else happens when you keep a journal like this. You stop and think about things. Not only that, you think about how you felt about it, or what you did. Being able to look at yourself and your world, and know how you feel about it—that is really important. One way that the ability to understand ourselves can get stronger is by writing and drawing in a journal.

"I sat and watched a turtle for a while, and drew it. Usually it's hard for me to just sit still for a while. But I kinda had fun looking at all the parts of the turtle and how **he** could sit still like that!"

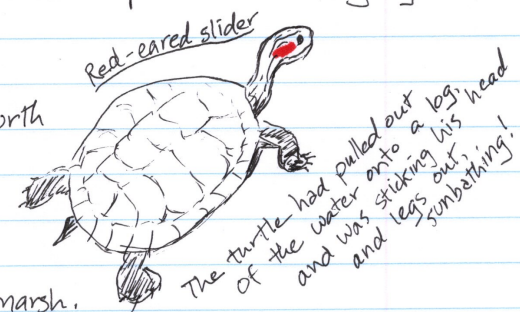
There are books about nature journaling, and some of them concentrate on drawing and others focus on writing. There are also classes that teach nature journaling. If you think it would be helpful, you could check some of them out. You can also just start writing and drawing. On

the next page, I'll show you some "helpers." These are reminders about what you might want to include in your nature journal. You can use them if it helps.

August 23rd, 2022

It's still **summer!** But not as hot today—the weather report said it was going to be in the 90s.

We went to Fort Worth Nature Center in the morning, to go sit on the boardwalk over the marsh.



We saw ducks and turtles, and a big bird with a long neck and long legs!

I sat and watched a turtle for a while, and drew it. Usually it's hard for me to just sit still for a while. But I kinda had fun looking at all the parts of the turtle and how he could sit still like that!

— Ethan

Nature Journal

Date:/...../..... My name:

Who I was with:

Location:

The season & time of day (morning, afternoon, night):

What I noticed about the sky and weather:

.....

What I noticed about soil, rocks, water, and the overall shape of the land:

.....

What I noticed about plants, trees, flowers:

.....

What I noticed about wildlife / other living things:

.....

Sights, sounds, smells, what I felt and touched:

.....

What I noticed about myself:

.....

Other thoughts:

.....

Make sure to leave plenty of room for drawing (maybe the blank area on the back of the page). I hope that you will draw, but I also hope that you will write. Drawing is all about what we see, but we don't want to leave out the other senses. Next time you tell somebody about some place you visited, think about how much you talk about what you *saw*. The rest of it—what you heard, smelled, or touched—that's important, too.



Look at this photo of a beach (I took it at Boca Chica beach near Brownsville). Imagine all the sounds. How would you describe how the waves or gulls sound? How does salty ocean water smell? What about the feeling of all that sand, the packed sand that the waves keep wet and the loose sand in the dunes? Can you find the words to describe all of that?



Imagine being at Pedernales Falls State Park, where the photo on this page was taken. It is a clear, sunny day in October. What would it be like to be there? Once you have it in your imagination, I'd like for you to focus on what your ears, your nose, and your skin would tell you if you were there. What do you hear as the clear water tumbles over the rocks and boulders? Listen for any birds that might be nearby. Imagine bending down and putting your hand in that water on that day in autumn. How would it feel? If you walked over to the grassy banks of the Pedernales River and got on your hands and knees, would there be smells from grass and flowers?

All of those things you imagined about being at the river on that day would make a great nature journal entry! And when you really are out in nature somewhere, stop and think about what you hear, smell, feel, and see. It will make the memory of that day clearer and stronger, especially if you write about it and draw something.

I hope you have some beautiful adventures during the rest of this summer and into autumn!

✍ Michael

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