



Learning Laguna Magnified

Volume 2

The Learning Laguna school program teaches students to notice nature everywhere. Students also learn that using our senses, curiosity, and creativity to explore nature is a great way to connect to the land, life and water around us.

In this volume, we share some tips for connecting to nature and using a journal as a tool for discovery.

Writing, doodling and drawing in journals helps us make sense of our feelings, thoughts and experiences. Once the journal experience steps outside, it helps one practice noticing nature in *real time*, observing patterns and natural processes *over time*, while nurturing oneself *each time*. Journaling is for you! Set your creative, reflective and curious spirit free, regardless of your drawing ability!

Grab a **notebook** or even just a piece of paper and a **clipboard** along with a **pencil**, pen and some colored pencils if you have them. (See below for tips on making your own journal.) Blank pages work well so you are free to write and doodle.

My special place. Find a spot outside that is comfortable to sit for 20 minutes. Maybe it is on the ground or on a rock or on a log, protected by a tree or shrub. Maybe your spot is on the sidewalk or a park bench. Your special place is where you are comfortable.

Ask yourself (and your kids) these questions as you sit in your special place to help focus your observations.

- When you first sit down, take a minute to breathe deeply and slowly a few times. Close your eyes. Feel the ground or bench underneath you, the air around you.
- Open your eyes & look all around for a moment: up, down, north, south, east and west.
- Sketch what is around you. Perhaps the view or something small like a leaf, a rock, a snail or a flower.
 - Add some descriptive words
- Make note of where the sun is. Make note of how it feels on your skin.
- Is the moon visible? Is the wind blowing? Are there clouds in the sky?
- Is it warm or cold or somewhere in between? Describe what the air feels like.
- Is there anything flying?
- What do you hear? Make notes of the sounds. Sketch what is making the sound
- How many different kinds of plants are around you? Sketch them. Notice the edges of the leaves. What does the stem or bark look like?
- Compare two types of plants
- Try looking at objects from different perspectives – from underneath or from the side.



- If you see a critter, draw a likeness of it, make note of where it is found & what it is doing. Record special markings or interesting behaviors.
- Record the number of times you hear a bird call.
- Make note of where birds land or insects crawl to.
- Keep count of how many insects you see.
- Use arrows, magnified view circles, add charts. Measure objects.
- What questions do you have about what is going on around you and what you observe?
- Add color!



Visit your special place each day with your journal. Try increasing your time spent. Try different special places. Over time you will see your skills grow and your relationship with the outside world deepen. *What else do you experience as you continue this new practice?*

Make your own journal. If it is personal, the more likely you or your kids are to engage with it!

- Gather a few pieces 8x11.5 paper – can even be once-used.
 - If you have a piece of heavyweight paper, use that for the outside.
 - Paper without lines is best for the creative freedom.
- Lay pages in a stack and fold the stack in half.
- Punch two holes on the folded edge.
 - Or, open and staple along the crease. Skip next couple of steps.
- Get a stick or an old pencil and a rubber band or some string.
- From the back side of your book, push one end of the rubber band or string up through each hole.
- Place the pencil or the branch on top of the book over the holes.
- Use the ends of the rubber band or string to secure the stick to the top of the book.
- Decorate the cover!

These tips & techniques are inspired by and adapted from curriculum created by BEETLES and John Muir Laws.

BEETLES: (Better Environmental Education, Teaching, Learning & Expertise Sharing) is devoted to creating:

- versatile environmental education professional learning materials;
- student activities for use in the field;
- a collaborative, resource-sharing network of environmental educators; and
- additional resources for field instructors, leaders, and classroom teachers.

To continue your learning, visit the website of [John Muir Laws](#) for videos, drawing tips, field guides and even free downloads.

The California Native Plant Society also has [nature journaling curriculum](#) and lots of other references and activities for parents and teachers.



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