

## **Environet Lesson Plans**

*Using journals to connect students to the curriculum*

Mark Linehan  
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## **Overview**

The following activity will be conducted with 11<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in Environet. Environet is an environmental biology course which places emphasis on student-driven Internet research about basic ecological principles and current environmental issues. The ultimate goal of the journaling activity is for students to develop a journal and PowerPoint presentation which highlights both the journal making process, and the journal itself. The motivation behind having students experience nature through journaling is that just like classroom walls, a computer limits the sensory interaction students often need in order to feel personally invested in the importance of the issues they are researching.

In order to maximize the various opportunities for students to develop a unique, personal, and creative “Outdoor Experiences Journal,” this activity will continue throughout a semester-long course. The majority of journal topics will be given to the students but they will have several opportunities to supplement their own creative ideas. The culminating PowerPoint presentation will allow students to assess their work and personal growth throughout the semester. It will highlight the journaling process, their journal, or both.

## **Objectives**

◇ Develop an Outdoor Experiences Journal that utilizes a multitude of journaling techniques.

*Note: Specific objectives and instruction for each journaling topic will be developed throughout the course and given to the students. An outline of potential journal topics is listed below.*

◇ Foster an *appreciation* for local “wilds” in their own yards, local woods, and school campus.

◇ Research at least one environmental issue and create a journal page for the topic which presents the problem, “players,” and potential solution.

◇ Develop a PowerPoint presentation that highlights their journaling experiences.

## **Procedure**

### **Journal**

The following list of “Journal Topics” will coincide with several units that we will cover in class and therefore offer ways to reinforce the core curriculum.

“Exercises” are not necessarily specific units covered in the class but do offer interdisciplinary opportunities and creative ways to enrich the course.

#### **◇ Topic: Plant Identification Walking Tour**

In an area of woods near the high school name and identify different trees and shrubs that are marked with fluorescent ribbon

that I have previously tagged and numbered. This unit will coincide with the Plant Identification unit and Dichotomous Keys.

Journal Entry: Press a leaf to preserve it and then adhere it to your journal. Students are free to develop a poem or narrative that discusses the plant identification process. Entries can be scientific or artistic in nature.

◇ **Topic: Mapping**

To coincide with a unit on mapping students are to use their journals to map an area of interest to them. This entry allows students to be creative in their representation of the area in that they can focus in on a very small area in their own backyard or even give an aerial perspective of their town.

◇ **Topic: Current Events**

At this point in the course we will have had the opportunity to discuss current environmental issues at both the local and global level. To personalize these topics students will create an entry that involves adding a newspaper or magazine article to their journal and writing a personal narrative about how this issue affects them. The narrative should include the problem, “players,” and potential solutions not already offered in the article.

◇ **Topic: Species Interaction through Photographs**

To coincide with a unit on species interactions such as predation and symbiosis, students will go to a quiet spot in the woods near campus and observe how two different species interact. In many cases species may simply avoid each other, which can be a form of interaction and therefore documented. This particular topic can serve as an opportunity to discuss how students interact with one another in school. What is social status? Why do hierarchies exist? Why do we avoid or interact with certain people?

The journal entry will consist of a photograph of the species interaction and a short narrative discussing the observation. Students are free to go into further depth discussing and photographing the nature of interactions among students.

◇ **Topic: Rare and Invasive Species Life Histories**

To coincide with a unit on local rare and invasive species as well as areas where invasive species have monopolized others, students will try to find an invasive plant species near campus. Students will press the plant and add it to their journals. Additionally, students will research invasive animal species on-line and add a picture to their journal. Below each photograph a scientifically based life

history of each organism needs to be included as well as the potential threat they pose to native species.

◇ **Topic: Human Impact on the Environment**

To coincide with a unit on human's impact on the environment, students will visit the woods near campus and look for examples of how humans have affected the environment. Garbage, yard waste, and trails are all evidence those who had been there before them. Students need to reflect on ways they can adhere to the "leave no trace" adage. The journal entry will consist of a list of as many examples of visible human impact that they can find in this small area.

◇ **Exercise: Using different senses to increase scientific observation**

Quietly sit in the woods blindfolded for ten minutes and carefully listen to your surroundings. Write a personal narrative that discusses the experience and how it feels to highlight our sense of hearing.

◇ **Exercise: Drawing**

Draw an organism that you see while quietly sitting in the woods. Be sure to include at least two different perspectives. For example, a close up of the organism or just one part of the organism, or use different drawing techniques/utensils to capture what you see.

◇ **Exercise: Student Interview**

This journaling activity requires two trips to the woods near campus. For the first visit, students will choose a place to quietly sit in the woods and develop a set of ten questions about the things they see around them. On the following visit, students bring a partner to the place where they develop the questions and conduct an "interview" with their questions. The partners should then switch roles to examine how each other interpreted their environment.

◇ **Exercise: Scavenger Hunt Map**

This exercise coincides well with the mapping unit but can be done on its own. Students need to draw a detailed map of a small area of the woods and provide written directions on how to get to the drawn plot in their journals. A partner then has to use this map and directions to find an object they have hidden.

## **PowerPoint Presentation**

As a way to culminate the semester-long course and to tie in the journaling experience to the Internet-based aspect of the course, students need to develop a PowerPoint presentation. Presentation guidelines allow students to discuss the

experience of making the journal, parts of the journal itself, or a combination of the two. Due to the personal nature of the journaling experience the parameters of this presentation allow students to only include aspects of their journals they feel comfortable with.

## **Assessment**

A noteworthy aspect of journals is the fact that they are very personal and subjective in nature. Therefore, the assessment of each entry will be done on a “check scale.” If the assignment was not done the student will receive a zero, otherwise the effort and quality of work will be given a  $\sqrt{-}$ ,  $\sqrt{}$ , or  $\sqrt{+}$ .

At the end of the semester the journals will be collected and graded with the weight of a quiz grade depending on the overall quality and effort. Students will be given a rubric at the beginning of the semester so they are aware of the criteria.

PowerPoint presentations will count as one test grade and a rubric with the specific criteria will be given ahead of time.

## **Conclusion**

The rationale for using journals in this class is to have a tool for students to develop a personal connection to the topics they are studying in class. While Internet-based research is an excellent way to bring world issues to students doorsteps, it does not necessarily convey the specific importance to their own lives and community. Journaling gives the students an opportunity to observe (and improve their observation skills) the complexity of nature all around them.

The PowerPoint presentation will act as a means of reflection and self assessment for the students. This culminating activity will force students to think about the process of journaling and hopefully give them a journal they can admire, and the skills they would need to do it all over again.

### *Resources:*

Some of the journaling ideas were developed from *the Walden Woods Project's Education E-Newsletter*, Volume I, Number 2, May, 2005.