

Make a Field Guide

Knowing the names of plants and animals can be an powerful way to build a connection to a place. It is also empowering, giving children a sense of ownership over their space, since they know the names of its inhabitants.

Creating a field guide gives students a chance to learn species names, while using their creativity and artistic side too. This can also be a chance to introduce “real” scientific tools, like taxonomic and magnifying glasses.

GRADES: 1st – 5th

INTENDED OUTCOMES: Head, Feet

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

- A few field guides for the local area – these come in different forms and can be full books with lots of text or full of photos and drawings
- Paper, pens, markers, crayons, paint, etc.
- Clip boards

SUGGESTED STEPS*:

- Introduce the idea of field guides by showing students examples. Notice how they are organized. What parts do you want to have in your guide?
- Discuss how we go about identifying a plant or animal. What features do we look at? For example, if an animal has wings, that might be one clue that it is a bird. To figure out what kind of bird, we might look at coloring of feathers, eyes, and feet, size, and body, wing, or beak shape. We might know that a plant is a tree by it’s sheer size. We can figure out what type of tree by looking at it’s bark color and texture and the size, shape, and number of its leaves and seeds.
 - Try picking a common animal or plant like a squirrel and asking students what makes it a squirrel – how do we know it’s not a cat or a bird?
- Create a list of the types of observations and characteristics you are going to include in your field guide. Maybe for each plant, students will illustrate or describe it’s size, color, and leaf shape and number – or any three to five features that stand out to them.
- Go outside and ask students to pick one plant or animal to illustrate (draw, paint, take a photo of, etc.) Help them to write down characteristics about that plant or animal. If possible, use an actual field guide, app, or the help of a local expert to identify the correct species name.
- Do this activity multiple times until you build up a collection of illustrations that students can use to identify the plants and animals in their local ecosystem!

*For more detail on the grade-level focus for natural and social concepts and sense of place, please refer to the Guidelines

TIPS AND TRICKS

- Laminate the pages of the guide and take them outside during recess and other outside times so that students can use them to identify things
- Don't know the names of plants and animals yourself? Don't worry! There are great apps, like iNaturalist, that use crowd-sourced data to fairly quickly identify images that you upload. The staff at Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks are great resources too.



Relevant Standards

RWC09-GR.1-S.4-GLE1&2