

Discussion Board/Journal

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Nature Journal

You will be observing an outdoor area and journaling about what you have observed.

- **Choose a site to observe.** It can be in your yard, at a park, in the woods, or anywhere outside that is interesting to you. Use a small area, about 1-2 meters square (you can adjust this depending on the area you are observing). Doing all of Crowder Park would be overwhelming, but just one centimeter square of well manicured lawn would be underwhelming. Choose a site that is easy for you to observe.
- **Observe the area** for 15-30 minutes twice each month. Jot down observations and thoughts while you are there. Note changes from week to week. Watch for signs of animals (large and small). Observe changes in plant life.
- **Write a journal entry** about each bi-monthly observation. Each entry should contain your basic notes and thoughts about the area. In addition there will be a theme for each entry (see below). Each entry should be at least 100 words long.

Entry 1: Describe the site. Include information about the surrounding area (housing, industrial, wild, etc) and how it might impact the site. *Due September 15*

Entry 2: Describe an organism that you can observe from each Kingdom. You probably won't be able to "see" an organism from every Kingdom, so think about what evidence there is in the area suggesting the presence of organisms from each kingdom. *Due September 30*

Entry 3: Describe the plant life. Include information about types of plants, approximately how many of each type of plant, and so forth. You don't have to know scientific names or even common names. If you do know the name of the plant, great. If not, describe it including approximately how many of that type of plant is in your area. *Due October 15*

Entry 4: Choose one plant species in your area and describe how it is adapted to the area you are observing. Adaptations are traits or behaviors that help the organism to survive. For example a vine type plant usually has tendrils that wind around a support structure or plant to help it climb to reach sunlight. Think about structure, reproduction (how does it get pollinated?), protection from herbivores, ability to survive a drought, etc. *Due October 31*

Entry 5: Compare how the site has changed since your first observation. What factors are responsible for the changes? *Due November 15*

Entry 6: What impact do you observe from the change in weather on plant life? On animal life? *Due November 30*

Entry 7: Describe how humans impact the site: Management, mowing, fertilizer, pollution, construction, industry, farming, etc. Describe how other organisms impact the site: moles tunneling, earth worms helping the soils, beavers building dams, are all activities that can impact a site. Observe and think about your area and see what you can come up with. *Due December 15*

Entry 8: Describe the impact of winter on the site. Include information about how organisms are surviving the winter, animal activity, etc. *Due January 15*

Entry 9: Describe and discuss any plant life that is still green (like an Eastern Red Cedar tree). If your area doesn't have any plant life that is still green, just write about your overall observations of the area. *Due January 31*

Entry 10: Describe the winter climate conditions of the area you are observing (amount of sunlight, presence of snow, temperature, wind, etc.) *Due February 15*

Entry 11: Describe the adaptations that you observe for organisms in the area you are observing to survive the cold weather. These adaptations might not be visible, but inferred. For example the absence of insect activity suggests that they are hibernating or overwinter in a pupal stage. *Due February 28*

Entry 12: Describe any activity that indicates spring is on the way. This can include sounds and smells. *Due March 15*

Entry 13: Compare how the site has changed since your first observation. What factors are responsible for the changes? *Due March 31*

Entry 14: Describe any insect activity. Bring a magnifying glass and get up close to see as much evidence of insects as possible. *Due April 15*

Entry 15: Describe any animal activity. Even if an animal is not present while you are observing, they often leave behind traces. These are referred to as biofacts (includes tracks, scat, nests, bits of fur, etc.). *Due April 30*

Each entry will be worth 5 points for a total of 75 points available. These points will be added at the end of the semester when the journal is complete.