



Tips for Using Nature Notebooks

Your students gaze out the window. Something has caught their attention: maybe squirrels chasing each other around a tree, worms wriggling on a wet sidewalk, or snowflakes swirling on a winter day. They are watching and wondering, intently focused and curious. Want to put this marvelous concentration to work? A nature notebook is a great way to do it! *Ranger Rick's* Nature Notebook pages will help your students closely observe the natural world and translate their observations into words and drawings. At the same time, they will build communication skills, deepen their science understanding, and enjoy spending time outside.

Why nature notebooks?

The natural world is endlessly fascinating—and full of learning opportunities. A nature notebook is a place where students can investigate nature in memorable, meaningful ways. As students add to their notebooks, they learn to:

- Observe carefully
- Formulate questions
- Employ the scientific process to investigate answers
- Communicate effectively in both words and images
- Reflect on their experiences
- Express themselves in their own voices
- Engage with the wonders of the world outside

Where can we use nature notebooks?

Almost anywhere! A schoolyard habitat area is ideal. So is any nearby wild or semi-wild place: a park; a trail; a pond, lakeshore, stream, or riverfront; a wooded lot or a meadow. But even a patch of lawn or a single tree can provide inspiration for investigation.

What should my students' nature notebooks look like?

It's up to you. Each month, a new *Ranger Rick's* Nature Notebook page provides an entry point. Students could start with three-ring binders or folders and add the monthly pages, as well as pages from the archive and blank writing and drawing pages. If you prefer a more open-ended and creative style, use the pages for ideas but have students do their writing and drawing in blank notebooks that they can personalize themselves.

How do we get started?

Students will need their notebooks, pencils, and appropriate clothing for the weather. Before you go outside, clearly explain your expectations for safe and respectful behavior. Be patient—at first, students are more likely to view the outdoors as a place to play than an extension of the classroom. But as you use nature notebooks consistently, they will learn to find their focus quickly and will look forward to this time with excitement.

No matter how you choose to use nature notebooks, you can feel good about the fact that your students are getting outside to explore, exercise, and connect with the natural world—and building useful skills at the same time.