

SLUG Journal and Discussion Prompts

Maintaining garden journals can be a great way to help students document and reflect on changes in the garden and classroom plants. The following list of journal prompts are designed to promote observation and investigation throughout all stages of the plant cycle.

If you would like additional information about making journals with your students as well as different examples of how you can integrate journals into your teaching, the National Gardening Association's Kids Gardening website (kidsgardening.com) is an excellent resource.

We value your input. If you have a suggestion for a prompt that worked well in your classroom, please contact SLUG staff. The information you provide will be added to future additions of the SLUG handbook.

General Prompts

- Write about a change you noticed in the garden, since the last time you were out.
- Describe something new you tried in the garden: a food, a job, or a conversation with someone you do not know well.
- Write a description of the garden from the point of view of the root, stem, leaf, or flower of a plant.
- What was challenging about your job today, what part was easy?
- Describe the plants using as many of the five senses as possible.

Plant Cycle Prompts

Seed starting

- What do you think the inside of a seed looks like?
- Can you think of any seeds that we eat?
- Are seeds alive? Why or why not?

Germination

- Describe the changes that you see in your seed. What new colors do you see? Describe the different textures that you see.

First Leaves

- Why do you think different plants have different shaped leaves?

Transplanting

- If you could be any plant, which plant would you be and why?

First buds

- Describe what you think the inside of the bud looks like. Predict when you think the bud will open.

Harvesting

- Describe being picked from the point of view of a fruit or vegetable.

Decomposing

- What do you think happens to your household food scraps? Where do they go?

Vermiculture

- What shape is a worm? Describe the shape.

Science-related Prompts

Seed Starting

- Are seeds alive? Why or why not?
- What does a seed need to sprout?
- How does a seed know how to start growing?

Germination

- Why do plants bend towards light?
- What are some reasons you think some seeds sprouted faster than others?

First Leaves

- What is the role of the leaves?
- Why are the second set of leaves different from the first?
- What happens when you deprive a plant of light?

Transplanting

- Why do we transplant?
- What part of the plant benefits most from transplanting?
- What do the roots do?

First Buds/Flowers

- What do buds become?
- What is the role of the flower?
- In outdoor gardens, can you think of any animals that like flowers? Why?

Harvesting

- Is it beneficial to the plant to have parts that people and animals want to eat? Why do plants have edible parts?
- How do some plants let you know when it's time to harvest?

Decomposition

- What is decomposition?
- Why does it take longer for some things to decompose than others?
- Why do you put compost on your garden?

Vermiculture

- Worms don't have eyes like ours. How do you think they "see"/perceive the world?
- Which of the five senses do you think is most important to them?
- Why can't worms have greasy foods?
- What other foods can't worms eat and why?

Math-related Prompts

Seed Starting

- Keep track of the number of seeds planted and the number that germinate. Use this information to calculate the percentage/fraction of plants germinated.
- Count the number of available cells/inserts/trays, and calculate how many seeds the class will be able to plant.

Germination

- Measure plants as they grow for X amount of time. Make a graph of their growth.
- Make a record of which plants germinate first, and put the information in a table.

First Leaves

- Make predictions about which plants will grow leaves first. Calculate the number of people who guessed correctly, the number who were off by one day, and the number who were off by more than one day. What fraction of the class guessed the correct day? What fraction were off by one day. What fraction were off by more than one day.

Transplanting

- Think about the size of the cell that you planted the seeds in, and the size of the pot. How much more space does the pot hold than the cell?

First Buds

- Track how long it takes the buds on a selection of plants to open. Create a graph to represent these different amounts of time.

Harvesting

- Weigh, measure and record produce.

- Which plants had the heaviest produce? The biggest? The most per plant?

Decomposition

- How long does it take plants to grow vs. decompose in vermicompost?

Vermiculture

- How many worms started out in the classroom?
- Did the amount of food you could put in the bin change over time? Why?
- Weigh the amount of food that you put into the bin, and then weigh the compost that you get out. Are the numbers alike?

Language Arts-related Prompts

Seed Starting

- If you could be any plant in the world, what plant would you be, and why?

Germination

- Describe something new you tried while working in the garden or with the plants indoors: a food, a job, or a conversation with someone you do not know well.

First Leaves

- Describe how you feel when you stand in the sun? How does it feel when you stand in the dark? Which one is more comfortable for you?

Transplanting

- If you were a plant, would you enjoy being transplanted? Why or why not?

First Buds

- Write a description of the garden from the point of view of the root, stem, leaf, or flower of a plant.

Harvesting

- Describe being harvested from the point of view of a fruit or vegetable.
- Write or tell stories depicting how early humans might have discovered plant dyes.

Decomposition

- If you could be any kind of animal or insect that helps in decomposition, which would you be and why?
- How would you persuade someone in your family that it's important to compost?

Vermiculture

- Describe a day in the worm bin from the point of view of a worm or of a vegetable scrap.

Art-related Prompts

Seed Starting

- Create seed packets for saving seeds or for unused seeds. (See seed packet template)

Germination

- Create colorful plant markers using popsicle sticks.

First Leaves

- Remove a small number of different leaves from plants found outdoors and do leaf rubbings. What do the leaf rubbings show about how the leaves differ from each other?

Transplanting

- Sketch a drawing of a healthy plant and an unhealthy plant. What are the differences between the two plants?

First Buds

- Make new home-made paper from old paper. Incorporate dried leaves, flowers or other plant parts into the paper. (For instructions, see <http://www.kidsgardening.com/growingideas/projects/nov02/pg1.html#paper>)

Harvesting

- Make block prints with different shaped vegetables or fruits. Potatoes and mushrooms work especially well.

Decomposition

- Create a sculpture from recycled materials (bottle caps, paper towel rolls, egg cartons etc.). How do recycling and composting differ as ways to get rid of waste?

Vermiculture

- Design and draw a worm palace. What features of this new worm home are especially appealing to the worms?

History and Culture-related Prompts

Seed Starting

- Acorns are easy to find in Boston. How do you think acorns were used by native Americans in this area?

- What do you think it means for a plant to be “native” to a particular place? Can you think of an example of a native plant?

Germination

- How can finding old, preserved seeds help us understand the history of a people?
- How does knowing a plant's origins help us determine the degree of protection it needs from weather extremes?

First Leaves

- What does it mean for a plant to be endangered? Why are some plants “endangered”?

Transplanting

- Invent a tool for transplanting using only natural materials that you can find outside.

First Buds

- List two ways that people use plants other than eating them. Describe if there any people you know who use plants in this way.

Harvesting

- What foods are part of your family's history and tradition? Why are they important to your family?
- Which foods that originated in other cultures have become popular staples or "novelty foods" here (e.g., tortilla chips and salsa, pizza)? When and how did they move into the mainstream in the U.S.?

Decomposition

- Your family's trash gets picked up every week by a garbage truck. How do you think families got rid of their garbage before garbage trucks?

Vermiculture

- How was a particular plant food historically processed or preserved? How is this accomplished today?