

## Focused Observation—Language Arts Extension

# PLANT, THIS IS YOUR LIFE!

### OBJECTIVES

Students will use the observations and journal entries made in the activity “Focused Observation Secret Plant Scavenger Hunt” in order to write the life story of a plant.

### BACKGROUND

As students will find in the corresponding journaling activity, plants go through dramatic changes as they pass through their life cycle. These changes can be observed by watching one plant over time or by finding plants at various stages of the life cycle in one location. Students can use these observations to construct a story around the life of a plant.

### MATERIALS

Writing materials

Journal entries from “Focused Observation Secret Plant Scavenger Hunt”

Secret plant for further observation (optional)

### PREPARATION

Complete the “Secret Plant Scavenger Hunt,” in the field. This activity can be done in the field, immediately after the corresponding journaling exercise, while continuing to observe the plants, or it can be done in the classroom with the journal entries as a foundation.

### PROCEDURES

As a group, write out the major events in a plant’s life cycle (e.g., seed being buried, watered, and then sprouting; emerging from the ground; growing leaves and shoots; flowering or producing cones; dropping seeds; wilting; dormancy. You can also include the idea of decomposition and what happens during this period. As necessary, brainstorm or list the major stages for younger students to be sure they include all of them.

Next, think about other kinds of significant events that might happen in a plant’s lifetime. Could a plant have an encounter with an insect or animal? What kinds? What might they do to the plant? What about other plants in the same area? What else can students think of that might be important to them if they were plants

Have students make a list of the unique features of their secret plant, based either on observing the plant in combination with the journal entry, or based on the journal entry.

Ask them to think about what they think may have caused these unique features to exist. In the example of a bug bite, what kind of bug do they think bit the leaf, and why? If a stem is crooked, could that be related to water or to the sun? When in the plant’s life cycle do they think that these features may have appeared?

Now, using their scientific journals and observations, have students write their plant’s life story. Remember to use both facts and imagination. For example, does their plant have a name? Any nearby friends? Students may choose to write this story in the first person, from the plant’s point of view, or in the third person, as a separate narrator.

This exercise can be tailored to various types of writing. For example, if students are practicing scientific writing, you may choose to have them write a detailed story with focus on observation and hypotheses, leaving out any personification inherent in writing a more imaginative story. Should students be working on improving their narrative writing, however, the focus may change again, and characterization, etc. may be emphasized.

### ENGLISH, LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

3rd Grade Writing: 2.1 (Write narratives) a, b, c

4th Grade Writing 2.1 (Write narratives) a, b, c, d

5th Grade Writing 1.1 (Create multiple-paragraph narrative compositions) a, b, c

### SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

2nd Grade 2c, d, e

3rd Grade 3 a, c

4th Grade 2b, c; 3a

## Focused Observation—Field Journal Activity

# SECRET PLANT SCAVENGER HUNT

### OVERVIEW

Students record detailed observations of a plant and challenge a partner to find the plant they drew.

### OBJECTIVE

This activity will get students to concentrate on details and drawing a real plant instead of simply reproducing a mental image of how a plant should look. Because the activity is presented as a game, it is a non-threatening introduction that gets everyone drawing and focused on natural details.

### PROCEDURE

Give Suggested Group Instructions. As students disperse, look for those who are spending too much time wandering around trying to choose a plant. They may need help. Pick a plant and say, “This one is good. Look, it has a bug bite on this leaf.” At the end of the time period, tell the students to find a partner. Important: if some students are still working on their observations and drawings, let them continue. They may be so absorbed in that part of the exercise that they want to continue. This is more important than finding the plant with a partner. Remind partnered pairs to show their partner the general area that their plant is in. The area will be smaller for a smaller plant, perhaps as small as a square foot. They can further narrow the search area if their partner has trouble. Once the partner finds the plant, the partner should point out what details were most helpful in finding the plant. When students return, ask the partners what details were most helpful to them. Students are often pleasantly surprised at their success.

### SUGGESTED GROUP INSTRUCTIONS

In the following instructions, as in those below, suggested times are given for completion. Those times are suggestions only and should be adjusted to suit the needs of the students and environmental conditions. “We are going to play a nature observation game. When I give the signal we are going to spread out and each of you will find a different plant to study. You will have fifteen minutes to record as much information about your plant in your journal using both writing and drawing. You want to be very thorough because at the end of the time period I am going to call you back to this spot. You will then select a partner, take your partner to the area you were journaling, and see if your partner can pick out the specific plant and not just the species that you were looking at just by comparing plants with your journal entries. Show your partner the general area that your plant is located in. Narrow down the area if your partner is having trouble locating your plant. Remember, the goal of this activity is to make drawings and notes that will make it as easy as possible for your partner to find the plant that you drew. Here are the boundaries for this activity.” Define boundaries so students will not wander too far. “If you would like to have a partner, make sure that the two of you are not sitting near each other while you are taking your notes. If you finish before the time limit is up, remain sitting and try to add a few more details. What might some of those details be?” Get suggestions from students: color and detailed notes, bent leaves, insect bites or discolored spots. “Any questions? Ready, set, go!”

### SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

3rd Grade 5.b, 5.e

4th Grade 6.a

Focused Observation—Field Journal Activity

