

A Penny for Your Thoughts: Cross-Curricular Journal Writing



Grades 4–7 (non-departmentalized)

Using AIT Products

- *Club Write*, program 1, “Journal Writing”
- Plus several other programs in the Cross-Curricular Journal Suggestions (See Appendix A.)

Overview

A journal is an incredibly versatile instructional tool. Many teachers use journals in one or two subject areas, primarily language arts and science. The purpose of this lesson is to encourage teachers to consider the benefits to be had in using journal writing in *all* subject areas. Rather than the journal becoming an end in itself, with entries graded on their merits as written communication, the journal is better used as a tool for students to clarify their thinking, develop their own style, and record observations of their world and how it affects them personally. Using programs from AIT series across all curricula, beginning with the journal-based series *Club Write*, the lesson will demonstrate effective ways to encourage students to make journaling a life-long endeavor.

Objectives

- Design a personal journal for capturing thoughts and feelings.

- Write personal responses to literature, social studies, science, math, music, art, and media through writing.
- Express opinions, emotions, and curiosity in a variety of concrete forms.



“I want to write, but more than that I want to bring out all kinds of things that lie buried deep in my heart.”

—Anne Frank

Vocabulary

author	point of view
blogs	sketchbook
fictionalized	songbook
field journal	writing prompt

Preparation

Materials Needed

- AIT video *Club Write*, Program 1, “Journal Writing”—CUE the tape to the beginning of the program (about 15 minutes in total length).
- A selection of blank writing journals of various styles and types (see **Planning Notes**).
- A selection of published journals, for illustration purposes only (see **Planning Notes**).
- HANDOUT: **Penny Image** (see Appendix B)—one penny for each student
- OPTIONAL—For students who cannot procure their own journals, materials for creating one:
 - ✓ Filler paper, both lined and blank (20 to 40 sheets per student)
 - ✓ Tag board or clean file folders (any color)
 - ✓ Paper fasteners or waxed string or twine
 - ✓ Paper hole punch

Planning Notes

- Collect examples of blank journals. (NOTE: If this isn't feasible, try to locate pictures of different types of journals. Some commercial Web sites featuring pictures of a variety of journals are listed in **Resources**.)
- Create a sample of a student-created journal by folding several sheets of blank filler paper in half (or leave them full-sized for a larger journal). Create a cover from blank tag board or a colored file folder, trimming the cover to

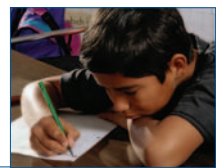
the same size as the paper. Punch holes along the spine, and use paper fasteners or waxed string/twine to bind the pages together.

NOTE: Avoid using colored construction paper or yarn for this project; the journal needs to be sturdy enough to last through several months of constant use.

- Visit the public or school library to gather a selection of published journals before the second part of the lesson. See **Resources** for a suggested booklist.
- Day One suggests allowing the class to decide together whether journals should be graded. If you decide you want to grade the journal entries, omit that activity (marked “optional”) from the lesson.

Time

This project will take about two 45-minute class periods, separated by at least a week to allow students time to find or create a journal. Additional suggestions are provided for utilizing journals throughout the curriculum year.



“To write meant then and still does, catching sparks of thought in a hard-backed notebook balanced on my knees.”

—Doug Robinson

Procedure—Day 1

Introduce Topic: Create the Penny Journal

Write the phrase “A penny for your thoughts” on the board, and ask student to explain what it means. Ask if they’ve ever kept a journal, and have volunteers describe in general the kinds of things they’ve put in journals, or how past teachers may have used them in their classrooms.

Explain that students will be creating a journal this year to be used in every class, not just Language Arts. The journal will be used in every subject area. It may be necessary to start a second journal in the event that the first one fills up!

Previewing Activity

Pass around the journal examples (or pictures of journals), and discuss the differences in journal types. Explain that choosing a journal is a very personal decision and different people will be drawn to different types of journals. For some people, creating their own journal makes it even more personal, because the creation of the book is another form of self-expression. In the video they’re about to see, students consider several kinds of journals, selecting and using them in ways personal to them.

Video

Prepare students for watching the first AIT video from *Club Write* by explaining that this program is the first of a series about a group of students who join an after-school journal club. Each program highlights the personal experience of an individual member. The journal of that member is used to allow the audience to view the experience from that student’s point of view. PLAY *Club Write* program 1, “Journal Writing.”

To make this an active rather than a passive viewing experience, PAUSE at the on-screen graphic pause points to discuss what has hap-

pened in the program up to those points. Some additional discussion starters (from the *Club Write* teacher guide) might include:

1. After Sarah and Robin look through Kyle’s journal at the mall, PAUSE the video. Emphasize that journal entries are not finished products. Then discuss possible uses of Kyle’s comic strip as a story idea. Ask, “What would Kyle need to do to turn his journal entry into a story?”
2. After Sarah reads the story about Lewis and Clark in the library, PAUSE the video. Discuss the importance of historical journals. What insights do they give us into the past?
3. After Robin writes her journal entry about Otter Creek Park, PAUSE the video and ask students: “Why did Robin write about the park as her journal entry? Why does she like writing in the park? What are some places where you like to write? Do you prefer to write in noisy or quiet places?”
4. After Brad writes his entry about how he loves music, PAUSE the video and ask students, “How is Brad’s journal entry different from the others?”

Group Work: Exploring Journal Types and Privacy

Divide the class into groups, and have groups discuss the types of journals they saw in the program. Which type do they think they’d prefer? Did any of the example journals the teacher brought in catch their fancy? Have groups discuss the relative merits of lined pages versus blank. How is journaling different from online “blogging”? NOTE: Encourage students to discuss the usefulness of computer-based journals, but explain that, for the purposes this journal will serve, a hard copy is required.

As a second part of the group discussion, students should consider privacy issues. Do they

think a journal entry is something they would like to share with everyone, with a few select friends, or should it be considered private? What are some of the differences between writing or drawing in a personal journal and writing or creating artwork that will be viewed by other people? When might it be a good idea to share a journal entry, and when is privacy more important? **OPTIONAL:** Should the teacher occasionally collect and read through journal entries? Should the journal become part of a student's grade?

Gather students together in a whole group to share and discuss each group's opinions. Collaborate on a set of "rules" for journal writing, based on the second part of the group discussion. **NOTE:** This lesson plan doesn't include assessment suggestions. The decision about whether or not to grade students on their journal entries is left to each individual teacher.

Homework

Give your students a deadline (at least a week) to find, buy, or create a journal that is uniquely their own. They might decide to use one of their regular school notebooks, purchase one of the journal types they explored in group work, or simply create one. Make sure students know that you have materials available, should they decide to create a journal rather than buy one. Be sure to obtain a journal of your own, too!

If students select a journal with a blank cover, they can decorate it with designs or pictures as Sarah did in *Club Write*—hand drawn or pasted graphics from the Internet or a magazine. The important thing is to make a unique journal that reflects each student's personal tastes. Remind students a couple of days before the deadline, so that everyone is sure to have a journal for the next part of the lesson.

Procedure—Day 2

Review/Reflection

NOTE: This lesson is conducted after students have had the time to get a journal. Have students share their journals with the class (in small groups if time is short). They can explain why they chose that style and size of journal, what their decorations represent, and how they expect to use the journal.

Group Work: Exploring Published Journals

Divide the class into groups and pass around the examples of published journals—some real journals and some fictionalized. Ask groups to discuss the different ways these people used their journals, what their journal pages look like, and how each journal expresses the personality of the user. Make sure students note that journal entries don't have to be text-only. Many people use their journals to draw things they want to remember, and might even glue or tape flat objects like movie tickets or pressed flowers on the pages. The important thing about a journal is that it expresses the user's individuality.

Independent Work: Begin the Penny Journal Journey

Pass out the handout of the **Penny Image** and have students cut it out and affix it to the inside cover of their journals, adding the phrase "Penny for My Thoughts." Ask students to "break in" their journals by writing (or drawing) on the first page the types of things they want to use the journal for. How will their journals reflect their own thoughts and personality? Explain that you're going to be asking them to use their journals in every subject area, and will be referring to it as their "Penny Journals," because it's a place to record their thoughts.



“Journal writing is a voyage to the interior.”

—Christina Baldwin

Procedure—Ongoing

NOTE: The remainder of this lesson plan contains suggestions for using students’ Penny Journals in various subject areas. They aren’t intended to be covered in one day (see Appendix A). You might also consider exploring other programs from the *Club Write* series for more Cross-Curricular Journal Suggestions. In each instance, model the activity in your own journal, and share your entries with students often. In this way, students understand the value you place on journaling for personal expression, and will be less likely to view the activities as more work imposed on them by an authority figure.

Resources

I. Several commercial Web sites offering images of a variety of personal journals

USA Pad: www.usapad.com

Aspinal of London:
www.aspinaloflondon.com/select_style_us.asp?CategoryID=7&RangeID=1&pausJO1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=ppc&utm_term=journals&utm_campaign=journals&utm_content=us

Target: www.target.com/gp/browse.html/602-1056021-3784669?node=12975721&AFID=Google&LNM=Journals&ref=tgt_adv_XSGT2672

Boston Museum of Fine Arts:
<http://store.mfashop.com/mfajournals.html>

Levengers:
www.levenger.com/PAGETEMPLATES/NAVIGATION/PRDPREVIEW.ASP?Params=category=322-325level=2-3link=IMG&cm_ven=Google&cm_ite=journals&engine=adword_s&keyword=journals&SITrackingID=883857

II. A collection of published journals (most can be easily found at the public or school library)

Ambrose, Stephen A. *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, Revised Edition. Mariner Books, 1997.

Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Bantam, 1993.

Moss, Marissa. *Rachel’s Journal: The Story of a Pioneer Girl*. Silver Whistle Books, 2001.

New, Jennifer. *Drawing From Life: The Journal as Art*. Princeton Arch, 2005.

Perrella, Linda. *Artists’ Journals and Sketchbooks: Exploring and Creating Personal Pages*. Quarry Books, 2004.

Appendix A: Cross-Curricular Journal Suggestions

Journaling in Language Arts

Introduction: Journals fit naturally within the language arts curriculum. Besides using their journals for opportunities to flex their writing muscles informally or because of a teacher's writing prompt, encourage students to use them at any time: to list words and terminology that are new to them, make notes of quotations that catch their fancy, list characters or story ideas they might want to use in later writing assignments, and so on.

Penny Journal: Video Springboard (Writing Genres): *Heroes Read*, program 3, "One Fine Day: A Radio Play." CUE the video to the beginning and PLAY the entire program (about 16 minutes in length). After discussing the author's comments and the radio play, ask students to rewrite in their journals any short story passage into a radio or TV script format.

Penny Journal: Vocabulary Suggestion: Create a "Word of the Day" bulletin board. Each morning post a challenging word. Have students copy the word in their journals and guess its meaning and part of speech, use the word with that meaning in a sentence, and draw a picture illustrating it. After five or ten minutes, provide the true meaning of the word and allow students to write the correct definition and create a new sentence or illustration.

Journaling in the Fine Arts

Introduction: Artists and songwriters carry "journals" with them everywhere (they call them sketchpads and songbooks, but the idea is the same), because they never know when inspiration will strike. Encourage your students to use their journals to make sketches or jot down lyrics of songs (or notate music if they know how) whenever something strikes their fancy.

Penny Journal: Video Springboard (Visual Arts): *Portraits of Artists*, Program 1, "Barney Saltzberg." CUE the video to the beginning and show the entire program (about 20 minutes in length). Ask students to describe how Saltzberg uses his journal. Instruct students to take their journals with them on their next errand and find something interesting, like Saltzberg's chair, to draw.

Penny Journal: Music Suggestion: Play a recording of a popular holiday or seasonal song for students, and write the lyrics from the selection on the board. Discuss how the lyrics might change if written for a different holiday or season. For example, what if "Winter Wonderland" was written about summer? Have students select another holiday or seasonal song, help them locate or write down the lyrics from memory, and then create new lyrics by changing the perspective. They should work to keep the rhythm and beat of the original, so that the song could be sung to the same tune.

Journaling in Math

Introduction: *Journal entries may include steps for solving difficult problems, explanations of problem-solving tips and techniques, and math vocabulary. They can make note of their feelings about math in general or list the things they've done to try to figure out new and difficult concepts.*

Penny Journal: Video Springboard (Math and Literature): *Club Write*, program 8, "Math Writing." CUE the program to the beginning of the story, and STOP the video at time code 04:51, after Mr. Parsons says, ". . . and write a story about the triangles" (about 4 minutes in length). Use the video clip as a springboard for a similar journal activity.

Penny Journal: Story Problem Suggestion: Prepare three containers, labeling one "Characters," the second "Theme," and the third "Numbers." On separate slips of paper, write suggestions for each of these topics, fold them in half, and place them in the containers. During journal time, have students draw slips and use the character, theme, and numbers in a story problem that illustrates the math concept they've been practicing in class. Suggestions to get you started: **Characters**—Dinosaur, gym teacher, astronaut, pro football player, class clown, detective, weather reporter; and **Themes**—Camping, yard sale, amusement park, zoo, grocery store, playing video games, dinner time.

Journaling in Social Studies

Introduction: *If your students have seen any of the Indiana Jones movies, they might remember that Dr. Jones carried a small journal with him everywhere he went. In that journal he made notes and drawings of the artifacts he was investigating or searching for. Encourage your students to use their journals as historians, mapmakers, and archeologists do.*

Penny Journal: Video Springboard (History): *Newscast from the Past*, program 1, "July 14, 1148." CUE the tape to approximate time code 10:03, and FREEZE the image of a man holding a horse collar (but don't tell students what the object is). Explain that this is an item that was invented in the middle ages. Instruct students to sketch the object in their journals, add detailed notes about the size and materials of the object, and write a guess about what they think the item is and what it was used for. After 2 to 3 minutes, REWIND the tape to the black screen at approximate time code 09:50, and then PLAY the video through the end of the "commercial", near time code 10:21. Allow students to write in their journals again, telling whether or not they were right and making corrections to their information.

Penny Journal: Geography Suggestion: Remind students about the Lewis and Clark journals that Sarah explored in the *Club Write* program "Journal Writing" (or share the book described in the **Resources** section). Tell them to imagine that they are someone who has never been to your county. Have them write imaginary journal entries describing the environment. They should make note of waterways, woods or deserts, wildlife, and other features unique to your locale.

Journaling in Science

Introduction: *Science journals provide a natural place for students to record observations, hypotheses, and results of experiments, but students should be encouraged to use the journals for less formal science enquiries, too. Describe for students the science “field journal”, and how it is used. (E.g., combine science and social studies by having students describe the behavior or the habitats of the wildlife they list for the Geography Suggestion, in Journaling in Social Studies.)*

Penny Journal: Video Springboard (Physics): *Minds on Science*, program 5, “Gravity: Can an elevator help us lose weight in a hurry?” CUE the video to the beginning and PLAY to approximate time code 04:34 (as the students leave Rollo’s garage to return to the amusement park). Have students write the questions that the kids in the video are curious about. PLAY through the end of the program (total length, about 16 minutes) and discuss how the kids went about finding the answers to their questions. Encourage students to use their own journals to list any topics or questions that spark their curiosity.

Penny Journal: Life Science Suggestion: Pass out two leaves from different types of trees to each student, without identifying the trees. Students should tape or glue the leaves in their journals, and write down what they can observe from those leaves. How are they alike, and how are they different? What trees do they think they come from? What color would they turn in the fall?

Appendix B: Penny Image

