

Writing in the Garden

Lesson ideas from the New Jersey Agricultural Society Learning Through Gardening program

OVERVIEW: It is easy to link writing with the school garden. Your students will be learning something new every time they visit the garden. Give them the opportunity to share their knowledge through writing.

GARDEN JOURNALS: Journals are an essential tool when teaching in the garden. It is impossible to plant seeds or teach any other hands-on lesson with 20+ students at once. Our recommendation is to teach in the garden using the approach teachers use when teaching small reading groups. While the teacher focuses on a small group, all the other students in the class have a task to work on, and if they have a question or don't understand something, they can quietly ask another student.



Journals can be used the same way when visiting the garden. Children can write in their journals when the teacher is working with a small group. The journals can be used in a variety of ways:

- *Garden observations:* What has changed in the garden since the last visit? Are there leaves that are yellow or have holes? Are some plants thriving while others are struggling? Students record their observations and hypothesize the reasons for the changes.
- *Science experiments:* Students record data for science experiments such as recording the growth of different plants or the amount of rainfall.
- *Poetry:* Teach different types of poetry and ask students to try them in the garden.
- *Stories:* Take notes for or write rough drafts of stories about the garden.
- *Pictures:* Younger students can draw pictures and practice writing words or sentences about the garden.
- *Free writing:* Record any feelings, questions, or ideas about the garden.

WRITING FOR AN AUDIENCE: The garden is a wonderful opportunity for students to practice real writing for an audience. Every school garden needs support from community volunteers and businesses, and the best way to publicize your garden is for students to write about their gardening experiences.

Ask students to write about everything they do in the garden: planting seeds, transplanting seedlings, weeding, battling garden pests, observing plant growth, and harvesting. Then post your students' writing on your teacher or school website or blog, or publish them in the classroom or school newsletter. The students' writing will pique the community's interest and attract volunteers and donors to your garden.

Types of Writing:

- Younger students can make drawings and write words and sentences.
- Students can write paragraphs on different gardening subjects.
- Older students can write all types of essays: informative, descriptive, persuasive, or narrative. They can compare and contrast the garden in different weather and seasons.

DONATION REQUESTS AND THANK YOU NOTES: All schools have a wish list of items they would like for their gardens. Instead of teachers or parents approaching local businesses for potential donations, teach your students to write polite letters or emails requesting a donation. This is a great life skill for your students to learn. And what business is going to say no to a written request from an elementary student? When a donation is given, the students can then write thank-you notes, another useful skill.

GARDEN PEN PALS: Teach your students that gardening can be very different in different parts of the United States by becoming pen pals with a schools in a different climate. Your New Jersey students will be very curious to discover how gardening is different in Arizona, Florida, or Maine. The National Agriculture in the Classroom organization has representatives in every state and can aid in pairing pen pals across the country.

New Jersey Learning Standards

English Language Arts: PreK:W.PK.1,2

K:W.K.1.2,3,7,8

1:W.1.2,3,7,8

2:W.1,2.3,7,8

3:W.3.1.A-D, W.3.2.A-D, W.3.3.A-D W.4,7,8

4:W.4.1.A-D, W.4.2.A-E, W.3.3.A-E W.4.4,7,8

5:W.5.1.A-D, W.5.2.A-E; W.5.3.A-E, W.5.4,7,8

