

Phenology Project Write-up  
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### **Background**

I became interested in tracking phenology when I was a graduate student at the Teton Science Schools in Grand Teton National Park. We undertook a yearlong project of tracking the changes occurring the natural world around us. As an amateur photographer who wanted to practice my skill I chose to document changes in color and light with photography. I created a collection of photographs, which I made into a book.

The next year I taught at the Methow Valley Community School in Winthrop, Washington. This is a small, independent school serving 40 students in grades 1-6. The valley is a beautiful natural place and I was teaching science as well as coordinating the outdoor education program. It was a perfect opportunity to teach, practice, and observe Phenology with my class. I have found that phenological observation is a powerful way to practice place-based education and works well as a method of connecting students to their environment.

### **Photography**

The project has evolved over the past two years, but shared a common vision of the students practicing observation of their natural surroundings by taking photographs throughout the year and then presenting their observations and photography in some sort of presentation. All students were required to have some sort of camera. Most of the younger students used 2-3 disposable cameras and some of the older students had small digital cameras. Both kinds worked well. The students were very excited to take pictures and to explore their natural world through the lens of a camera. We had a few professional photographers come in throughout the year to give slideshows and talk about their profession as well as composition, how to use a camera, and techniques.

### **Art and Poetry**

Art and poetry were another strong component of the project. Students brought a small field journal on trips and did drawings and writing throughout the day. We hosted two guest artists, who had a particular interest in creative journaling, for a day in the field. It was important to provide the students with good examples of what the depth of their work and exploration could be.

### **Phenology Log**

Every week at the beginning of science class I have my students write a phenology log, which includes the date and 4-5 observations they have had of the valley and its changes that week. I give them a few quiet minutes to write observations and then I take their observations and make a list at the front of the class. We have posted their observations around the classroom. As these posters start to take over the class, I have typed up the observations and make a binder of the documents. My hope is that we can do this every

year and compare notes. We have discussed climate change and we do the phenology log in the context of a changing world and climate.

### **Location**

The phenology projects we have done have taken place in different locations. Last year I let the students choose a particular theme and photograph that theme wherever they chose. This year, we included younger students in the project and felt it was necessary to focus the project so we have taken a monthly trip up to a local nature area called the Sun Mountain Beaver Pond. This is a fantastic area to explore with beavers, osprey and other birds, aspen and conifer groves, and nice trails. We have tried to visit the Beaver Pond once a month to do art, science, photography and writing.

### **Presentation**

Last year the students created posters of their photographs that highlighted their individual theme. Student had chosen themes such as clouds and shadows, weather, light, wildlife, the area around their house or a specific place in the valley. They each set up a little station around their poster that included artifacts that related to their project. For example, a student that had studied wildlife had collected a jawbone of a deer, a feather, etc. We held our final presentation at the end of the year at the gallery in town. It was a nice space to showcase their work and made the project look really nice.

This year all of the students' work has been compiled into their individual books. I ordered nice, blank hardcover books from Treetop Publishing at [barebooks.com](http://barebooks.com). The students have pasted pictures in the books, drawn maps or other pictures, and written observations in the books. Our plan is to have an end of the year *Phenology Phest* at the Beaver Pond, inviting parents and community members to celebrate the work we have done.

### **Resources:**

- Sarah Varick: [Sarah.Varick@gmail.com](mailto:Sarah.Varick@gmail.com)
- Maria Coryell-Martin, expeditionary artist, [www.expeditionaryart.com](http://www.expeditionaryart.com)
- The North Cascades Institute, [ncascades.org](http://ncascades.org)
- Barebooks.com
- Keeping a Nature Journal by Clare Walker Leslie and Charles Roth
- A Trail Through Leaves: The Journal as A Path to Place by Hannah Hinchman
- Sky Tree by Thomas Locker
- The Methow Naturalist: A Quarterly Journal of Natural History, [www.methownaturalist.com](http://www.methownaturalist.com)
- Field guides