

Field Journaling Activity From John Muir Laws: In one of the session, we did an activity on naturalist drawing for field journals. It was such a simple activity that was very powerful for me.

He had us each pick a leaf out of about 20 similar leaves (all birch). Our only instruction: Draw this leaf in a manner that someone will be able to match the real leaf to your drawing among a bunch of leaves. Use drawing, but also writing and other ways of relaying information about your leaf. He basically challenged us to be able to represent our leaf well enough that it would be matched with the drawing.

We had just seven minutes and access to paper, pencils, pens and colored pencils. Then at the end, he laid out all of our drawings on the outside of the circle and all the leaves on the inside. One by one, we matched the leaves to the drawings. It was amazing how well everyone did, how people focused on what was unique about each leaf. One small trick was to lay down the leaf and make small dots along the edge to get the outline right – but that was the only drawing trick he gave us. A lot of people wrote down information, made rough measurements, detailed drawings of one part of the leaf, codes for coloring, etc. I myself am somewhat afraid of drawing and was amazed at how well it came out. And we were all attached to our drawings, and leaves. I could see this as a good activity at teacher workshops, as an introduction to journaling.