

EVENT COMIC

Students create a series of simple diagrams, much like a comic book or a movie storyboard, to record an event they have witnessed.

Making a comic or storyboard is a fun way to document observations and develop visual communication skills. Laying out panels and showing the flow of action using sound effects, arrows, and other touches give students creative freedom while keeping the focus on accurately documenting what they saw. Then students can deepen their memory and strengthen their storytelling skills by writing a narrative of what they saw. The approach of going from a visual representation or storyboard to writing a story scaffolds the process of writing a narrative.

NATURAL PHENOMENA

If you spend enough time outside, you are bound to witness exciting nature dramas, but you can't schedule them. This activity is best done spontaneously, in response to a cool "nature moment." For example, you might get to see a falcon dive into a flock of shorebirds, blackbirds mob a hawk, a duck put on its courtship display, or a lizard catch prey. These condensed, action-packed events are ideal for making event comics. Also keep your eye out for more subtle nature dramas, such as a snail eating a leaf, or ants overcoming an obstacle in their path; although these events might seem less exciting initially, they are worthy of study and can make fun subjects for comics.

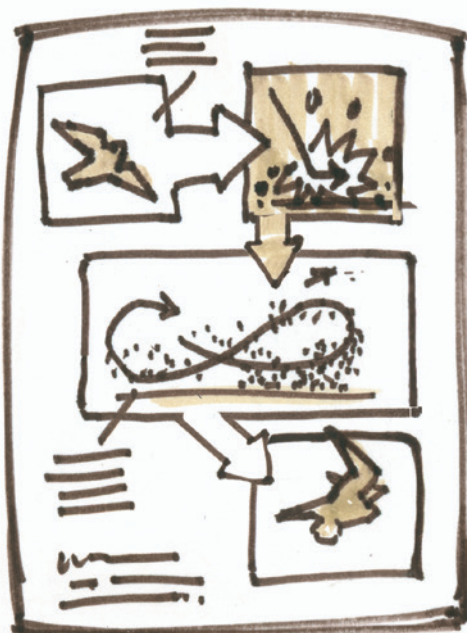
PROCEDURE SUMMARY

1. Describe the action of an event immediately after seeing it.
2. Use a series of panels and visual elements such as arrows, interesting perspectives, and action words to tell the story.
3. Have fun and be creative, but record observations accurately, staying true to the event that happened.
4. After finishing the comic, write a narrative describing the event, including as much detail as possible.

DEMONSTRATION

When the whiteboard icon appears in the procedure description: As students describe strategies for laying out the comic, create a simple replica of it on a whiteboard. Add elements and details that the students suggest, such as sound effects and action arrows. Consider long vertical or horizontal panels or elements that break out of the frame (an exciting comic book effect).

Students don't need to draw detailed portraits of the animals in the comic. The goal here is to tell the story of how the animals interact.



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Excerpted from the book *How to Teach Nature Journaling*,
published by Heyday books.

Time

Introduction: 10 minutes
Activity: 30–50 minutes
Discussion: 10–15 minutes
Extension: 15–20 minutes



Materials

- Journals and pencils



optional

- Examples of graphic novels
- Rulers

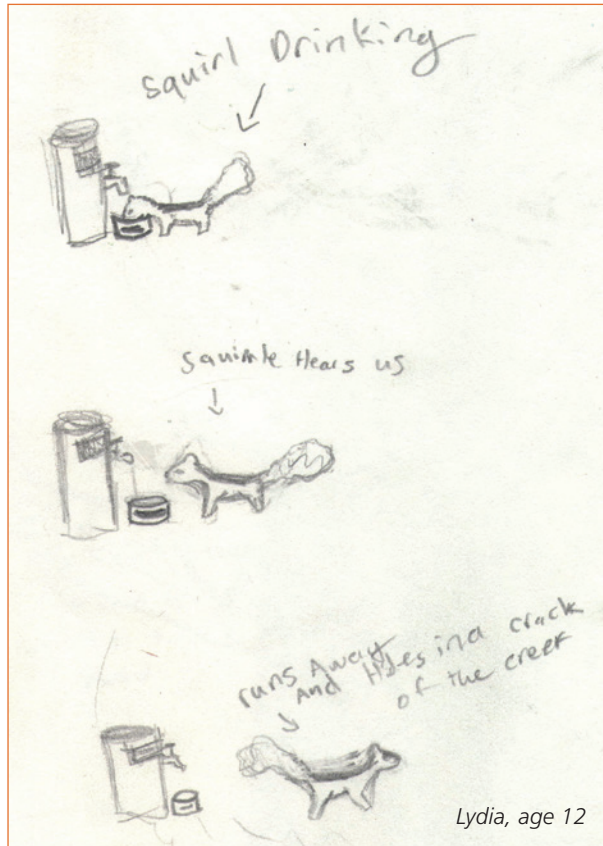
Teaching Notes

Memories fade quickly. Have students verbally review the event as soon as possible after viewing it to help them remember details long enough to get them on paper.

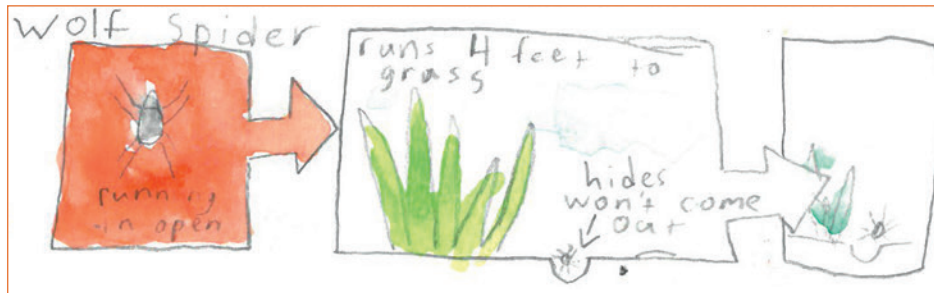


When we have our "scientist hats" on, we strive to be as accurate as possible in understanding the world, and anthropomorphism (ascribing human motivations and feelings to nonhuman things) sometimes gets in the way of that. It's fun to give a duck a thought bubble, but if we just think about what it would be like for us to be in the duck's position, we miss the opportunity to try to understand what it's like for the duck to be the duck. Students can strive for accuracy and still have fun in this activity by using anthropomorphism consciously, and discerning between their concrete observations (the hawk banked away from the raven) and their interpretations (the hawk was annoyed at the raven).

Any sequence of observations can be made into a comic-style journal entry. Students must break the seamless event into discrete observations that most clearly describe what they saw. In so doing, they learn to parse discrete moments from a continuous event and teach themselves the fundamentals of visual storytelling.



Arielle, age 10



PROCEDURE STEP-BY-STEP

1. After an exciting “nature moment,” prompt students to verbally review the details and order of events they just observed, and ask follow-up questions to keep the discussion going.

- a. “Wow, we were so lucky to see that hawk catch a snake! Quickly now, before we start to forget, let’s review what we saw, what happened in what order, and any details you remember.”
- b. “What were other observations we made? Were there any sounds we heard? What did we notice about the way the hawk was moving? about the snake’s behavior? about the landscape around it? What is the weather like right now?”

2. Explain that students will make a series of panels, imitating the format of a graphic novel or comic book, to make a “true-life” nature comic.

- a. “We are now going to document this event in our journals by making a true-life nature comic.”
- b. “In your journal, you will make a series of panels that show the full sequence of events with as many accurate details (not made-up ones) as you can include.”

3. Ask students for ideas on how they could creatively set up their journal page, recording their suggestions on a whiteboard and filling in with your own suggestions.



- a. “Laying out a story in a comic format can be creative and dynamic. What are some of the elements of comic books you have seen that make them exciting to look at, or effective for telling a story?”
- b. As students generate ideas, lay them out on your whiteboard. Ideas may include interesting points of view (such as the snake’s- or hawk’s-eye view), long or tall panels,

sound effects, close-ups, action symbols, arrows showing movement, and elements that dynamically break out of the frame.

4. Suggest that students take a moment to write down a plan for the number of panels or “scenes” they want to show, then tell them to begin.

- a. “You might want to start by writing down a plan for how many panels or ‘scenes’ you will show in your comic.”
- b. “Let’s take the next fifteen minutes while we still remember what we saw. When we are done, we can share and compare our work. Are there any questions before we start?”

5. As students work, take time to circulate, troubleshoot, ask them questions about what details they are choosing to include or leave out, and remind them to include metadata.

- a. “It’s interesting that you’re choosing to show the clouds in the sky behind the bird. Why do you think it’s important to include that?”
- b. “Remember to include your metadata—the date, location, and time. That provides important context for the story.”

6. Call the group together and have students discuss different ways to tell stories.

- a. “Making a comic is one way to tell a story, but there are other forms of storytelling. What are some other ways we could tell the story of what happened?” (Students might say making a film, writing a book, etc.)

DISCUSSION

Lead a discussion using the general discussion questions and questions from one of the Crosscutting Concept categories. Interperse pair talk with group discussion.

General Discussion

When students seem finished, or when it is time to move on, call the group together, tell them to take a moment to add a title to their comic, then to discuss their comic with a partner.

- a. “Add a title to your page that captures the story.”
- b. “Find a partner and talk with them about the types of details you both chose to include or leave out. Neither of you is wrong or right; it is just interesting to see how another person told the same story that you did.”
- c. “Compare the ways you chose to write your narratives. Are there any approaches someone else used that you could incorporate into other journal entries?”

Patterns

- a. “Have you ever seen animal behavior that was similar to this? What’s the closest thing to it that you’ve observed?”
- b. “What other situations might lead to the behaviors we observed today?”
- c. “Do you think the interaction that we observed between these two types of organisms is common? Why or why not?”
- d. “What are other ways these organisms might interact with other living or nonliving parts of this ecosystem? How might these behaviors be similar or different in other areas or ecosystems?”
- e. “What other organisms do you think might exhibit similar behaviors?”

Cause and Effect

- a. “Why might have the [hawk, bird, snake, etc.] behaved in the way it did?” (Refer to more specific behaviors if possible.)
- b. “What might have happened next after we stopped watching the animal? Why do you think that?”
- c. “Do you think these organisms might have acted differently under different conditions—for example, in another weather pattern, during a different time of year, or in the presence of some other organism? Why do you think that?”
- d. “What are other things you can think of that affect this organism’s behaviors?”

Structure and Function

- a. “Describe how the [deer, hawk, snake, etc.] moved. What body parts seemed most involved? Describe the organism’s movement in detail.”
- b. “When scientists study animals, they often try to think about how their specific structures help the animals survive in their habitat. How might some of the body parts you observed help the organism survive? Be specific in connecting the structure of the body part to its function. For example, don’t just say, ‘Its claws help it catch things.’ What is it about the claws’ shape or material that make it ideal for catching things?”

EXTENSION

1. Ask students to discuss how writing a story describing the event they witnessed is different than making a comic about it.

- a. “If you were going to write a short story of this event, what kinds of details would you need to include?”

- b. "How would it be different to tell the story using only words, without pictures?"
 - c. "What kinds of visual information did you show in your comic that you'd need to describe in words?"
 - d. "How could you use the information in the comic to plan or structure your written story?"
- 2. Discuss students' ideas, and add any of the ideas listed here that they don't bring up:**
- a. Students would need to describe the setting and the animals in their story, and could look at their comic panels to guide their thinking about how to do this.
 - b. Students would need to use words instead of arrows or pictures to describe the movement and interactions that took place, and could look at their comic panels to guide their thinking.
 - c. Students could use their comic as a guide for structuring their story, writing one paragraph to describe each panel and replacing arrows with words like *ran*, *jumped*, *flew*, and so on.
- 3. Tell students they'll have 15–20 minutes to write out a narrative version of their event comic. Circulate and support students who might be struggling, and ask students about the kinds of details they're recording in writing.**
- a. If students are struggling with the assignment, ask them to look at the first panel of their comic and describe it to you verbally, including details such as setting, behaviors, movements, and so on; then tell them to write down what they have said to you.
 - b. You can also offer some sentence starters, such as "First...", "After that...", "Suddenly...", and the like to offer support in writing about an event that unfolds over time.
- 4. Ask students to share their work with each other and notice differences.**
- a. "Compare the ways you chose to write your narratives. Are there any approaches someone else used that you could incorporate into other journal entries?"

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Studying Comics

Let students bring in their favorite comics or graphic novels. Analyze these as a class with an eye toward collecting dynamic effects, layout and design ideas, and elements that move the story along. Give students sticky notes to mark good examples and useful ideas. Then ask them to discuss when they might use these strategies in their journaling.

