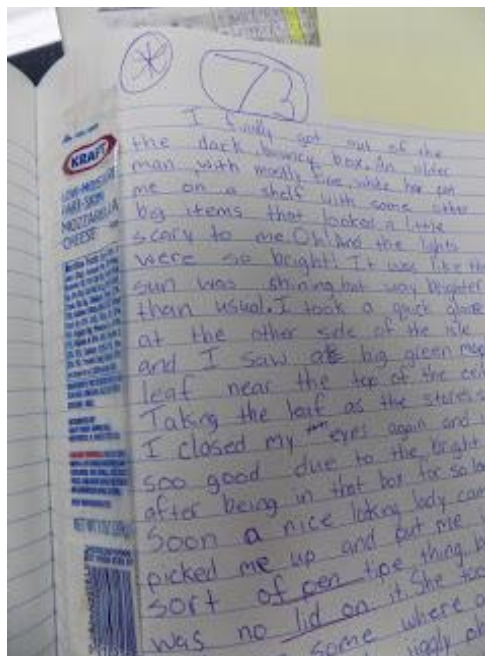


Journal Writing 101

I believe that there are four parts of a good English curriculum: grammar, literature, spelling/vocabulary, and writing. Most of the first three are covered extremely well in our schools by our textbooks; however, the writing is usually lacking, at least in my opinion. It is rarely covered until we get to the research paper section or the "writing" unit, which honestly just isn't much fun.

I believe that my students should have the opportunity to write a little something everyday, and that it should be low-pressure, creative, and even a little fun. I've been doing this every day for almost two years with the 36 middle school students that I teach, and this week I saw some of the results. Their research paper introductions were absolutely fabulous. They were creative, well-written, and thought-provoking. The best part was that the students liked the results, too.



This is not one of their research paper introductions.

This is a creative art journal entry. :-)

How Do I Get It Started?

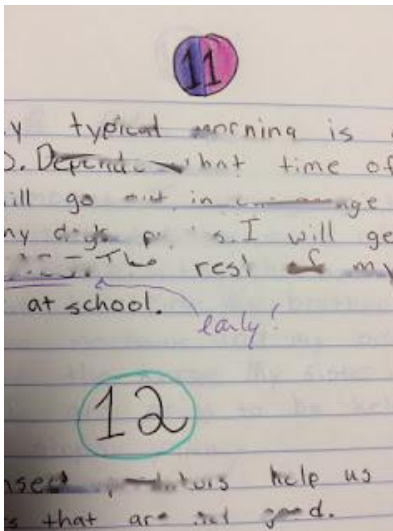
There are a few main parts to the plan, and a few nuts and bolts to make it work. Here it is as simply as I can put it. If you put this into practice, most of your students (even the gentlemen) will get to where they enjoy writing, and when it comes time for them to write a report, you will eventually see results. (It won't happen overnight though; be persistent and plug along. It will happen.)



I suggest using a bound composition book. These won't fall apart, and the students will have their own little book that they wrote all by themselves at the end of the year.

The Ten "Do"s

1. Have them write in their journals for about 3 minutes at the start of every English class. (I use an egg timer.)
2. Be prepared with a plan (see below) and make it fun.
3. ALWAYS give them visual or verbal examples, or both.
4. Have students number each entry with a large "95" (or whatever number you're on) at the top of the page. That way it's easy for you to count if every student did every entry.



5. Have the students turn their journals in once a week.
6. Check every entry, writing a little something (even if it's just a smiley face) on every single page. Write at least one longer, positive, encouraging comment per week.
7. **Do NOT correct any grammar, punctuation, or anything unless it's an official English assignment (which happens rarely), and tell them that for that entry you will check that stuff.**

8. Give them an "A" for a grade if they did all of the entries, and wrote at least three to five sentences (or more) per entry.

9. Before you hand the journals back, read two or three of the best entries out loud to the whole class. Hide the cover so it will be done anonymously and not embarrass the author. (*This one is important and will really motivate them to write more.)

10. After they've gotten the hang of things and are starting to write some good entries (it does take awhile, but doing number 8 will really help things along), once a quarter, hold a "Writer's Circle" where you bring in donuts (or bake a coffee cake), and each student reads their favorite entry aloud to the group. Help them by marking a large " * " on any extra-good entries when you grade them.



10. Tell your students from the beginning that this isn't some "Dear Diary" session. If they write anything questionable or that you are concerned about, tell them that it will be shared with the principal and/or their parents. Be professional!

The One "Don't"

REMINDER: Don't make writing these entries boring and tedious. Don't pick at grammar, spelling, or punctuation for these; the goal is get their thoughts on paper in a fun, easy way.

The Weekly Plan

Monday - At least one sentence for each question.

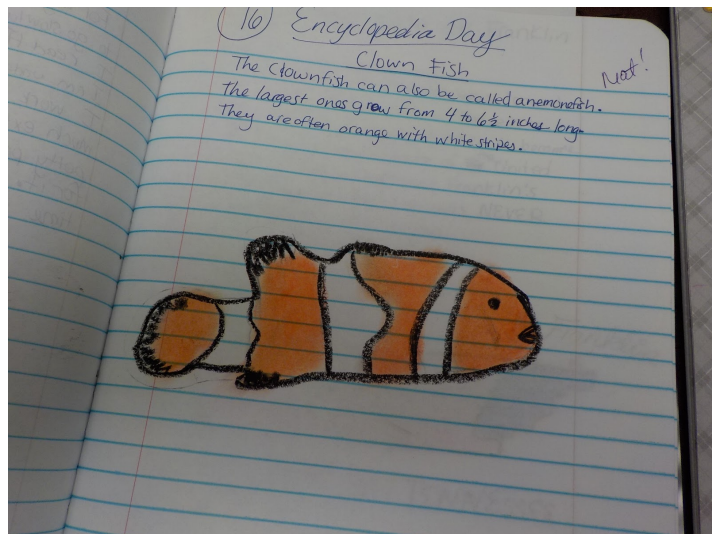
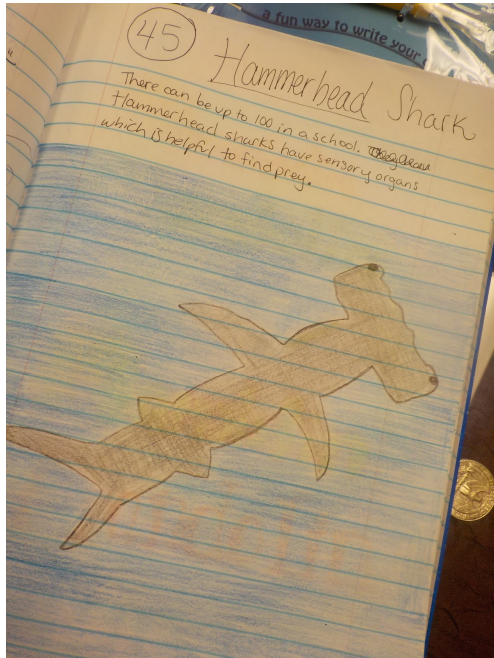
What did you learn in church yesterday?

How will you apply that to your life this week?

What was the best part of your weekend?

Tuesday - Teacher's Choice (see list)

Wednesday - Encyclopedia Day: Students find something interesting in an encyclopedia, sketch it, color it a bit, and write one fact they learned about it.



Thursday - Teacher's Choice (see list)

Friday - Creative Art Journaling Day (see list)

Teachers Choice List (Tuesdays and Thursdays)

- * Story Cubes
- * Family Talk game
- * Magazine Pictures (poem, news report, 1st person story)
- * English assignment (from textbook: character sketch, descriptive paragraph, etc.)
- * Ponder something interesting from history or science class. Pick a specific topic, and then give them a few options of angles to take on it so they can choose something that interests them.

Example: Would you have liked to have been a worker building the Panama Canal? Why or why not?

Pretend that you are a worker and describe your day.

Write a journal entry for a sailor on a ship sailing through the Panama Canal.



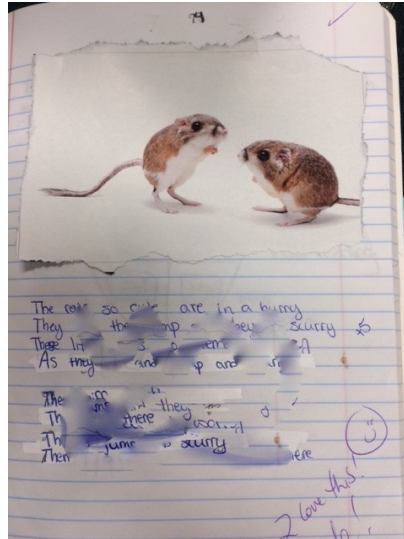


Story Cubes - I pick three of these out of the bag and roll them. Then I announce the topics. Today it was a turtle, a tree, and a fountain. So, I told them to write a true story that had really happened to them that included a turtle, a tree, or a fountain. I encourage them to have a real story. Not one student said, "I don't know of any story like that." First of all, that is not acceptable in my class. And they know I say, "Think harder or at least make something up," even if they did.

Note: These cubes are fun, but there were a few creepy pictures. I put stickers over those, and I told my students that I did it, too. Creepy stuff isn't acceptable either.



Family Talk game - I just flip to a card I like and then read it to the students. It's stuff like, "Describe your favorite meal." If I'm in a hurry and forgot to plan, it's a fun alternative. (I purchased both of these games at Target.)



Magazine Pictures - I have a large stack of edited magazines. (Stress on *edited*.) They are clean magazines, but I always make sure that there are no unacceptable pictures or articles in them. I pass one out to each student and tell them to find a picture they like and to tear it out. While they are doing this I walk around with my tape dispenser and put one piece of tape on the edge of their desks. Then they tape the picture to their journal page and write. I always give them some direction so that their thoughts are focused. This usually includes giving them two of the following ideas.

- Write a poem about your picture.
- Write a story for a newspaper.
- Write a first-person account.
- Describe your picture in detail.
- Make up a story about your picture.

English assignment - These appear occasionally in the textbook and we will complete them during journal time. First I'll model some ideas for them. If it's a character sketch, I'll tell them about my grandpa, what he looked like, how his shop smelled, what he would do and say, and about his character. Then I'll have them open their journals, write a mini-outline in the margin, and give them time to complete them. (I usually give them longer than normal for these.)

And here is a list of a few more of these Teacher's Choice ideas for Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Make a grocery list.

Describe your favorite meal.

Who is your favorite relative and why are they your favorite?

Write as many four-letter words as you can.

Write as many words that begin with the same letter as you can.

Write a letter to yourself. Then tell them that you are going to mail it to them in five years. Provide an envelope. I try to do this one the last week of school. I then put them in a box and date them.



What is your favorite chore? What is your least favorite chore?

What is one of the most important things your parents have taught you?

What hurts your feelings?

What is your favorite thing to do with your grandparents?

If you could be any animal, which would you be and why?

What is your favorite candy, and why do you like it?

What is your favorite season, and why is it your favorite?

What is something you would like to accomplish and why?

How would you describe your attitude about school, chores at home, etc.?

What do you do, or could you do, to encourage others?

What is your favorite family tradition? (This is a good topic around the holidays)

What is your favorite hobby or activity?

What interesting facts do you know about your ancestors?

Were you ever in big trouble? What happened and what did you learn from it?

What was your favorite game or toy when you were younger?

Write about a change that was hard for you. What did you learn?

What makes you feel most welcome when you go home?

How is your room decorated? Is it clean or messy?

Where did your parents meet?

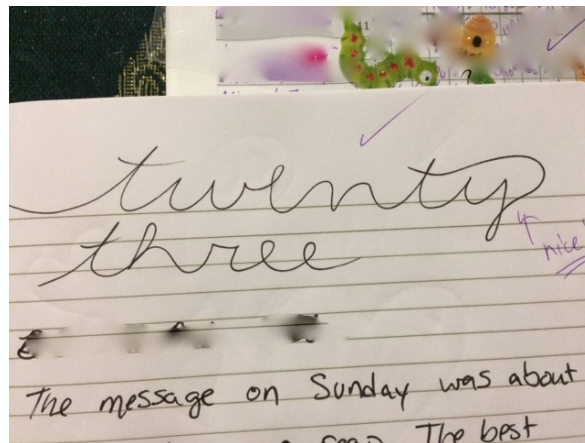
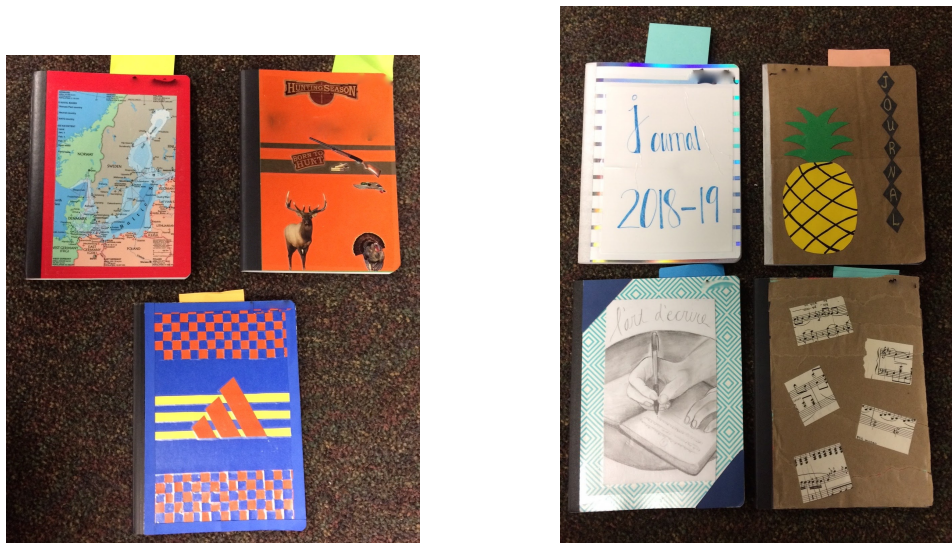
What makes you happy? What stresses you out?

What are your three favorite things to do and why?

If you were lost in the woods, how would you find your way out?

Write about someone who inspires you. Why do they inspire you?

Write edifying, encouraging notes to an assigned student in another class, fold them up, and turn them in. Then pass them out to the next class and give them time to write back. (Christopher Dock did this for students in the two different schools where he taught.)



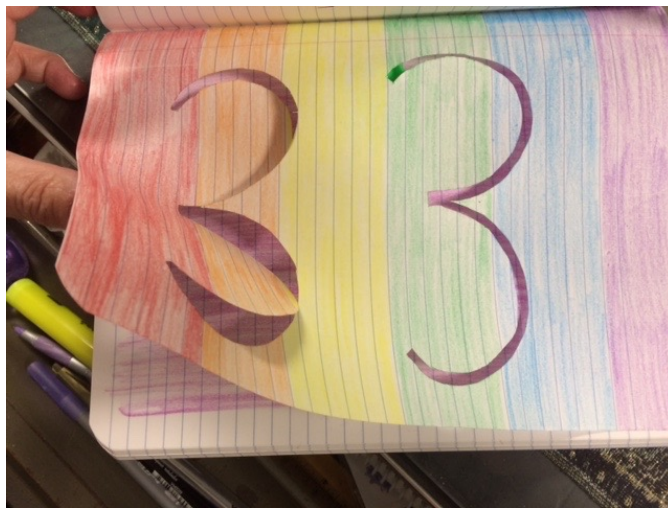
Creative Art Journaling Days

These are everyone's favorite. They usually don't involve a lot of writing, but they do involve two *muy importante* things.

1. They are fun and make journal time even more fun.

2. They are creative and use those other parts of the brain that do make students creative, and thus better writers on the other days, and better writers when it comes to writing book reports or research papers.

- Plan ahead and have supplies ready in a special place for them.



Sixty Ways to Draw Out the Creative Genius in Your Students

1. Decorate the cover of your journal. (I provide magazine pictures, craft paper, stickers, maps, etc., and clear contact paper for this one.)



2. Outline your foot, decorate it, and color it.



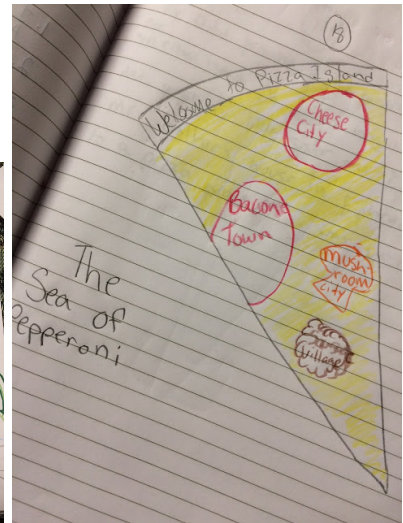
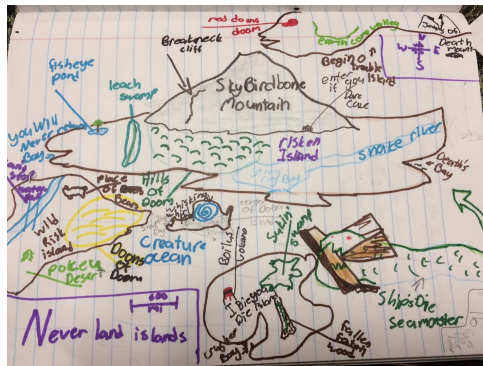
3. Using a pencil, poke holes in the paper.
4. Fold a page into something. Color it.



5. Tear the edge of a page and decorate it.



6. Design your own island. Label the cities, lakes, etc.



7. Go outside and find leaves. Tape them on the page. (This is fun in the fall.)

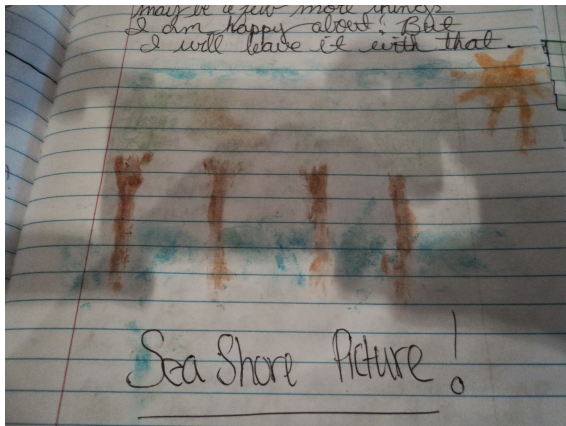
8. Do pencil rubbings. (Put items from desk under the paper.)

9. Draw lines on the page while walking around the classroom.

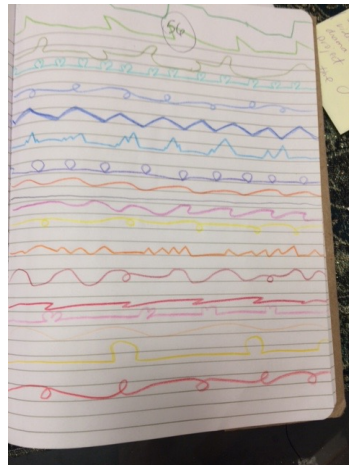
10. Draw around your hand and make a turkey (or anything you'd like) out of it.

11. Make a "test page" for your markers, pens, etc.

12. Lick M&Ms and rub them on the page. (Provide M&Ms.)



13. Draw squiggly lines.



14. Tear the inside of a page anyway you would like.



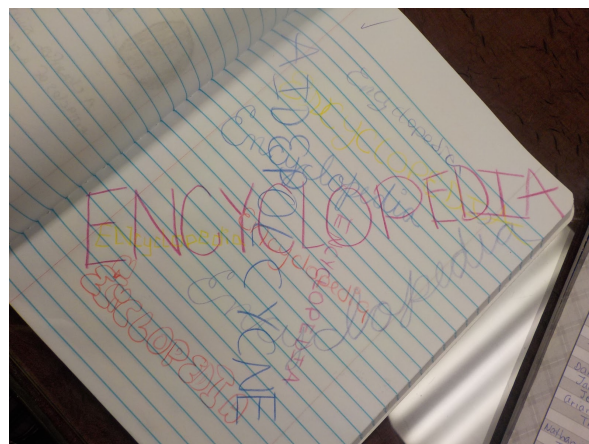
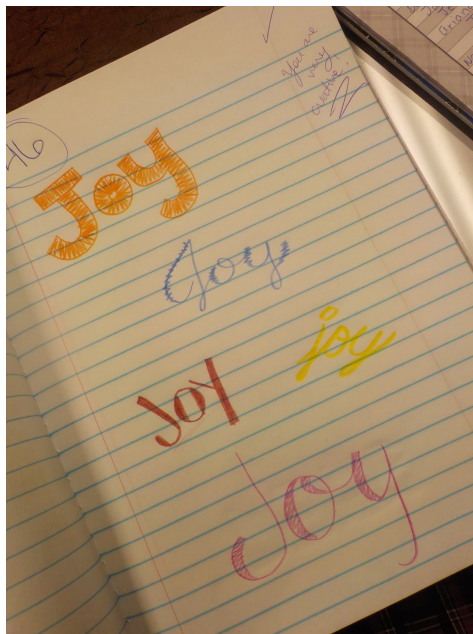
15. Draw circles. Color them. (Tell the guys that basketballs, soccer balls etc. are circles too.)



16. Draw your plate of food from dinner last night (or lunch today).

17. Make a paper airplane and tape it on a page.

18. Write one word over and over in different ways, fonts, sizes, colors, etc.



19. Drip paint on the page, then close the journal tightly. Reopen it and lay it on the back table to dry.

20. Trace at least three things from inside your desk. Label them so I'll know what they are.

21. Doodle all over the page.

22. Trade journals with a friend. Write a page in theirs, and they will write a page in yours. (Tell them this needs to be encouraging and edifying.)

23. Scribble.

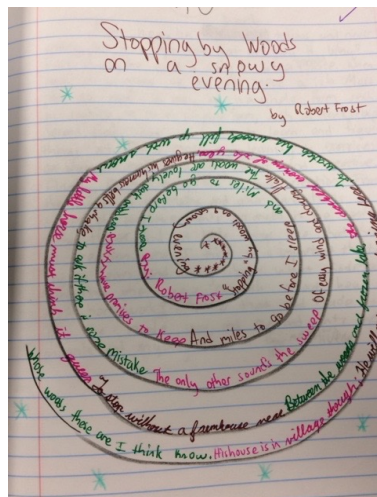
24. Fill a page with stamp prints using an ink pad. (Provide stamps and ink.)

25. Find three flat things and glue them on the page. (Things out of the trash are sometimes flat as well.)

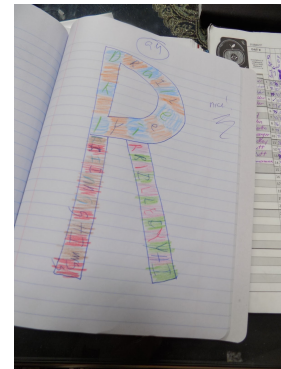
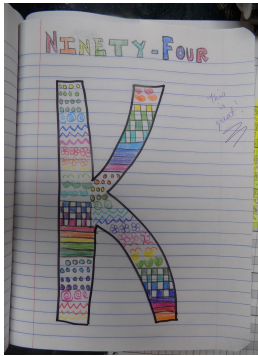
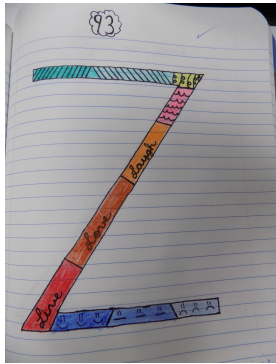
26. Cut a page creatively.

27. Make your own dot-to-dot.

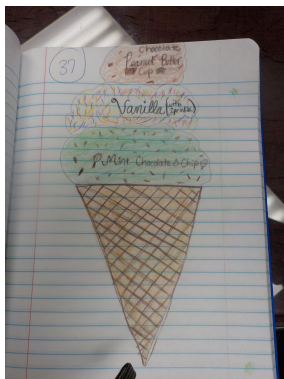
28. Write sentences in a spiral.



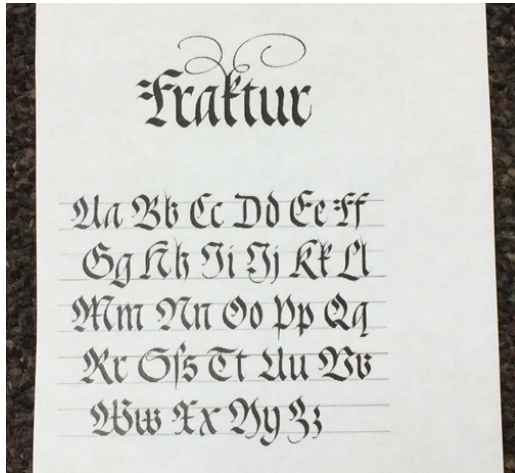
29. Draw or write with your left hand (or right hand if you are left-handed).
30. Design a sign or a business card for your future business.
31. Draw one long, non-stop line.
32. Write with your pen in your mouth.
33. Draw what you learned about in science this week.
34. Write your name and decorate it.
35. Write your initial and doodle all inside of it.



36. Make a map of your house and yard. Add details.
37. Draw your favorite ice cream cone and add two or three of your favorite flavors. Color it.



38. Write your name using this alphabet. (Then find an interesting font and make copies of it for them.) This is fun to do when studying early American colonization in history.)



39. Draw a spider web. Put spiders or bugs in it.

40. Decorate the back cover of your journal with the tape provided. (Provide washi, colored duct tape, ect.)

41. Draw ten hearts and write one thing you love or are thankful for inside each one.

42. Draw a quilt pattern and color it. (Provide a few designs to get them started.)

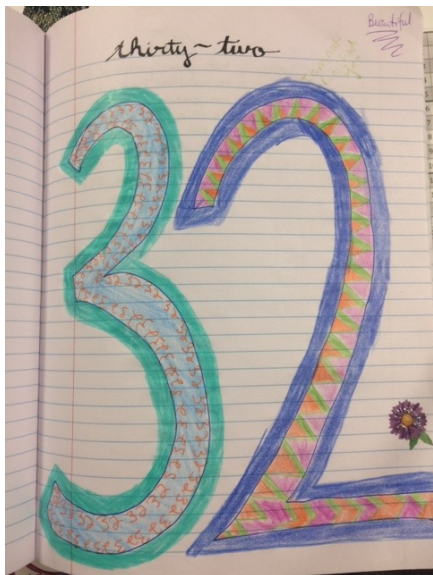
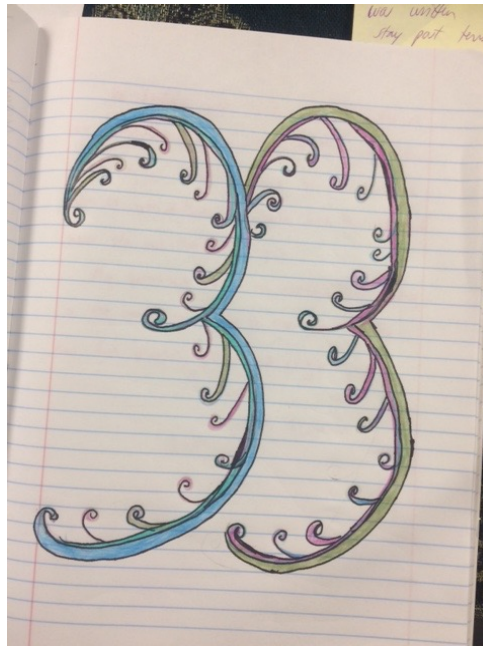
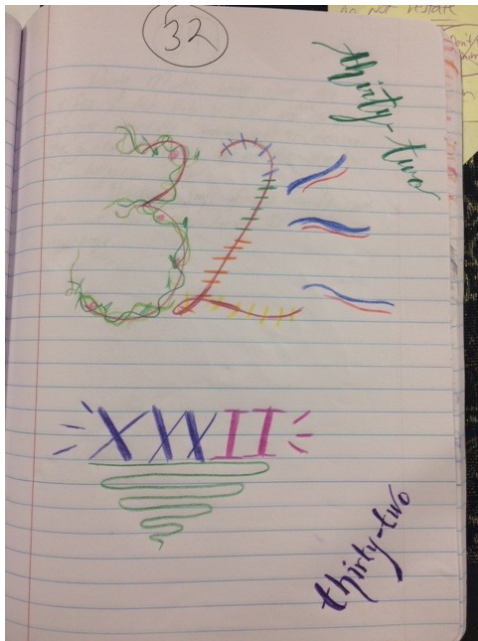
43. Draw where you would like to go on a vacation.

(Think: mountains, beach)

44. Make your own crossword puzzle.

45. Draw arrows all over the page and color them.

46. Write (or cut, or color) only the number of today's journal entry.



47. Make a color by number page.

48. Cut out paper dolls. Color them and tape them on the page.

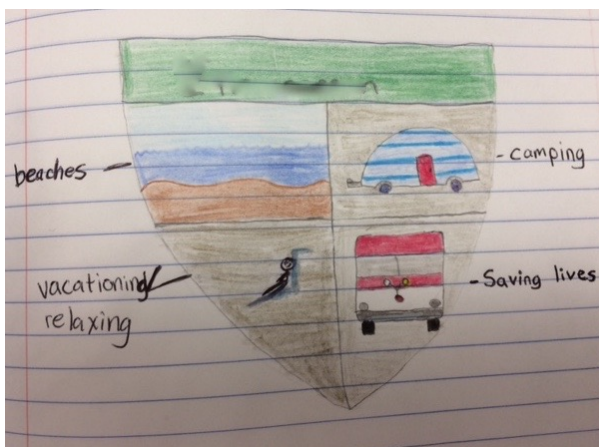


49. Create an invention. Design it, draw it, describe it.

50. Pop a balloon and glue the pieces onto the page.

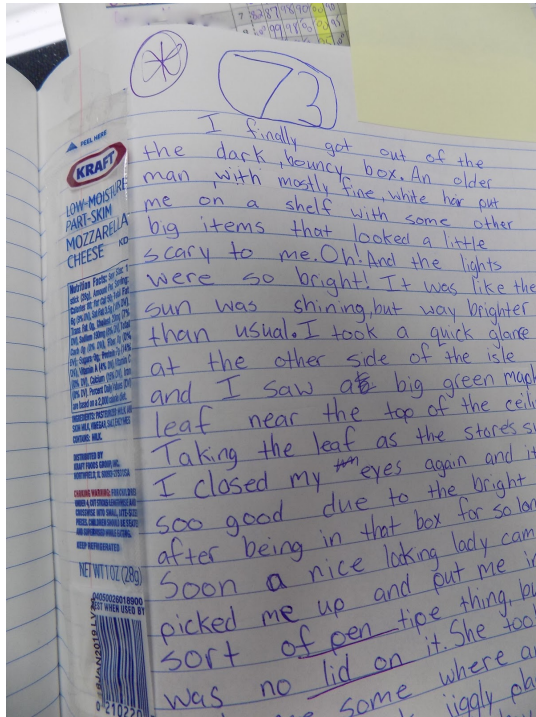
51. Design your own business card.

52. Draw a family crest. Put drawings of four things your family does together in each section.



53. Write a poem diagonally across the page.

54. Tape something random from inside your desk on this page. (It must be flat. We use trash sometimes.) Make up a story about it.



55. Put stickers on this page and write a story about them. (Provide stickers.)

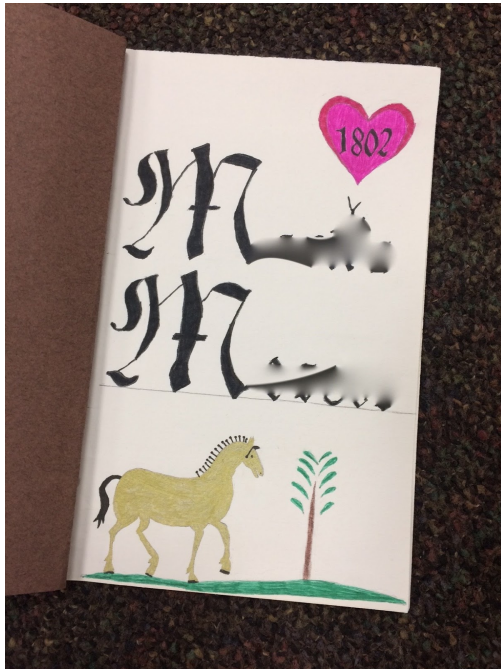
56. Describe and draw your favorite comfort food (soup, warm cookies)

57. Draw a cactus and color it. (Provide a few samples or pictures of real cacti.)

48. Draw a shirt collar at the top of the page and design a shirt. Include buttons.

49. Draw a fruit bowl with your favorite fruit inside it.

50. Write your name (or initials) in calligraphy on a page, then dip a tea bag in hot water and tea stain it. (Provide tea bags and sample calligraphy alphabet.)



51. Design and color a stained glass window. (Provide examples to get them started.)

52. Sign your name ten different ways.

53. Draw a flame and include at least four layers of different colors in it.

54. Write on a page using only highlighters.

55. Use grass, leaves, blown-out matches, bark etc. to make natural rubbings on a page.

56. Write your favorite Bible verse (or the Bible memory selection). Include the reference.

57. Design your own town. Include roads, rivers, buildings, mountains, fields etc.

58. Write a "Roses are red" poem.

59. Draw a clock on the page (digital or regular) and set it at your favorite time. Write why it is your favorite time.

60. Write as many words as you can think of which rhyme with "___".

The End!