

## Wellness Journals

As a guiding feature of this inquiry unit, I ask that students use a wellness journal or portfolio to showcase their growth, share their thoughts, and track their progress.

### ***Inquiry through Reflection***

Reflective thinking is defined as a part of the critical thinking process. It involves analyzing, and making judgements about what has happened, and how we feel (Lin et al., 1999). “Learners are aware of and control their learning by actively participating in reflective thinking – assessing what they know, what they need to know, and how they bridge that gap – during learning situations” (Lin et al., 1999, n.p.).

Students are not always aware of what they are learning and experiencing. Through reflection, they take their experience and make meaning out of it. However, as teachers, it is our job to facilitate this reflection process, and raise questions to help guide our students in ongoing reflection. There are several ways to reflect, including individually, through teacher-led discussion, or through peer dialogue (Herbert, 1995). For the purpose of tracking growth in this unit, students are encouraged and required to keep a wellness portfolio with a combination of written reflection, sample pictures, and learning throughout the term.

Reflective thinking provides “skills to mentally process learning experiences, identify what they learned, modify their understanding based on new information and experiences, and transfer their learning to other situations” (Lin et al., 1999, n.p.). As this project is year-long, students will be able to use their journal to distinguish their learning from others, share and see growth, and build reflective capacities to carry forward into their lives.

Teachers should be guides in reflective thinking, and give appropriate scaffolding to students. When asked to use the journal, teachers should provide an overarching question- for example the essential questions from that time in the unit. Lin et al., (1999) suggests the following to ensure appropriate scaffolding for reflection:

- Teachers should model metacognitive and self-explanation strategies on specific problems to help students build an integrated understanding of the process of reflection.
- Questioning strategies should be used to prompt reflective thinking, specifically getting students to respond to *why*, *how*, and *what* specific decisions are made.
- Social learning environments should exist that prompt collaborative work with peers, teachers, and experts.
- Learning experiences should be designed to include advice from teachers and co-learners.
- Classroom activities should be relevant to real-world situations and provide integrated experiences.

- Classroom experiences should involve enjoyable, concrete, and physical learning activities whenever possible to ensure proper attention to the unique cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domain development of middle school students.

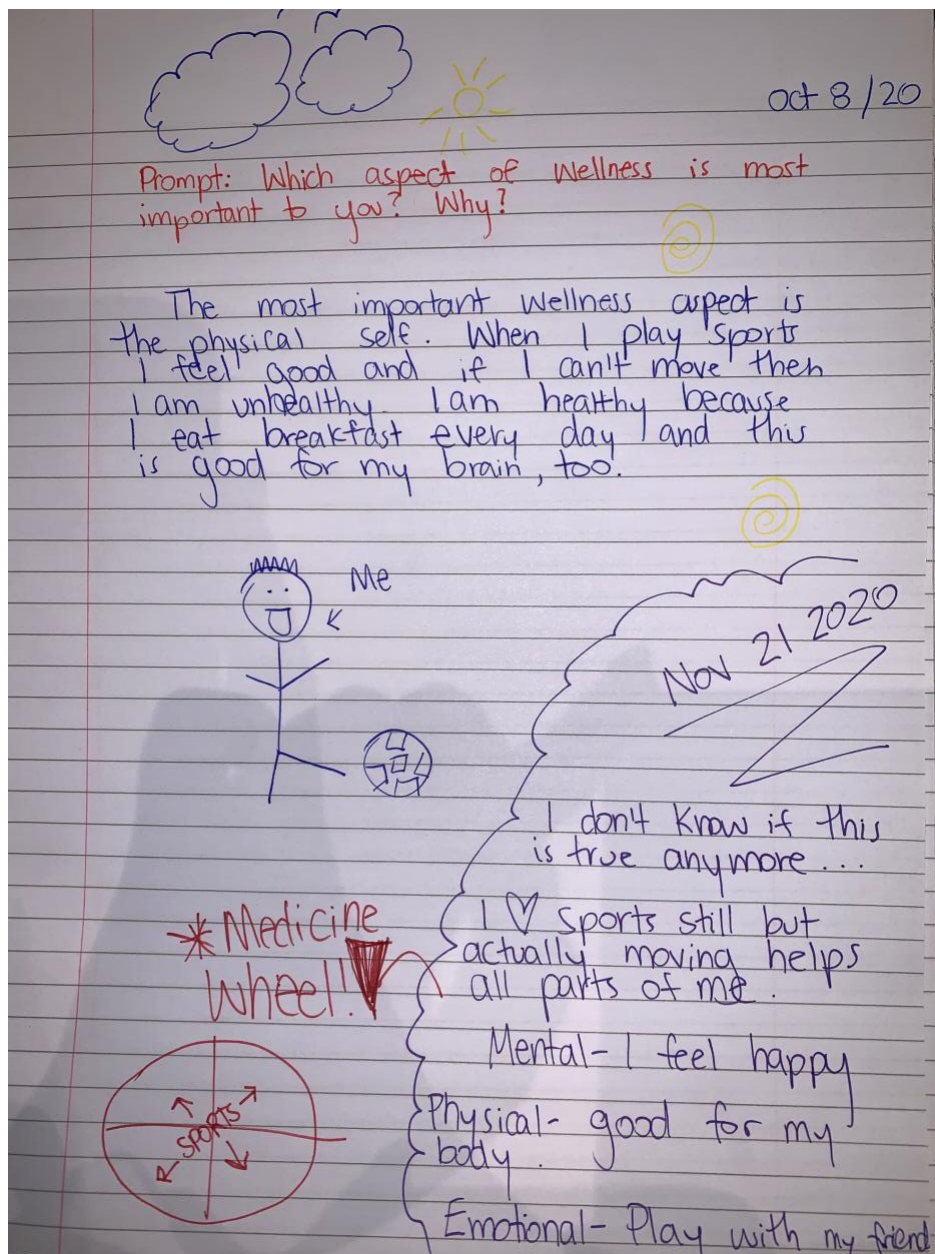
The journals should be discussed and assessed often, with feedback as an essential part of the journey. These sessions for feedback should answer or explore the following questions (Friesen et al., 2015):

- Where is your learning in relation to the learning goal?
- What have you figured out so far?
- What difficulties or frustrations are you encountering?
- What strategies have you tried already to address these problems?
- What other kinds of strategies might work?

Conveniently, Friesen believes the answers to these questions make strong journal prompts in themselves, and should be used frequently.

***Suggestions and Samples for the Wellness Journals:***

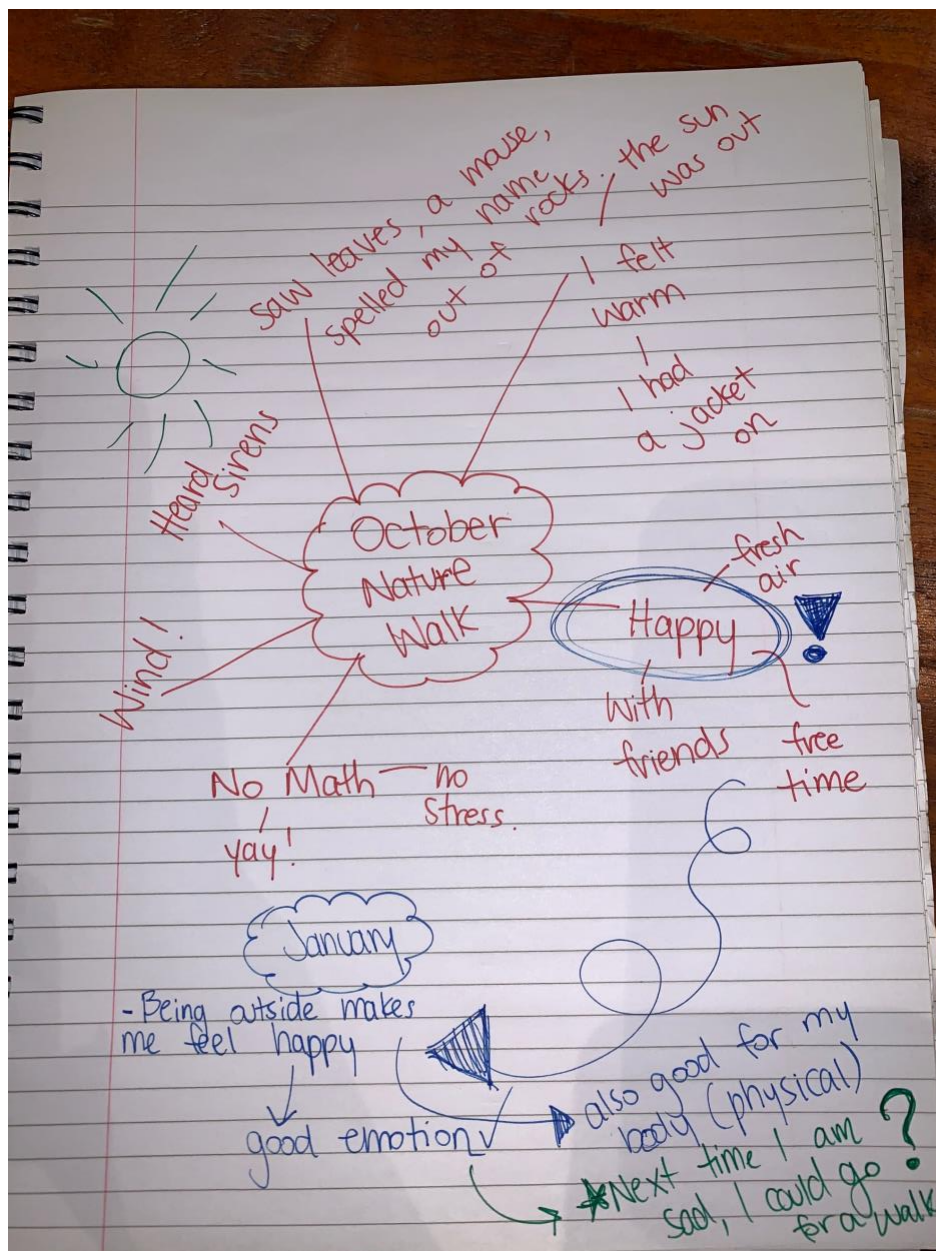
*Written response to prompt:*



#### Notes:

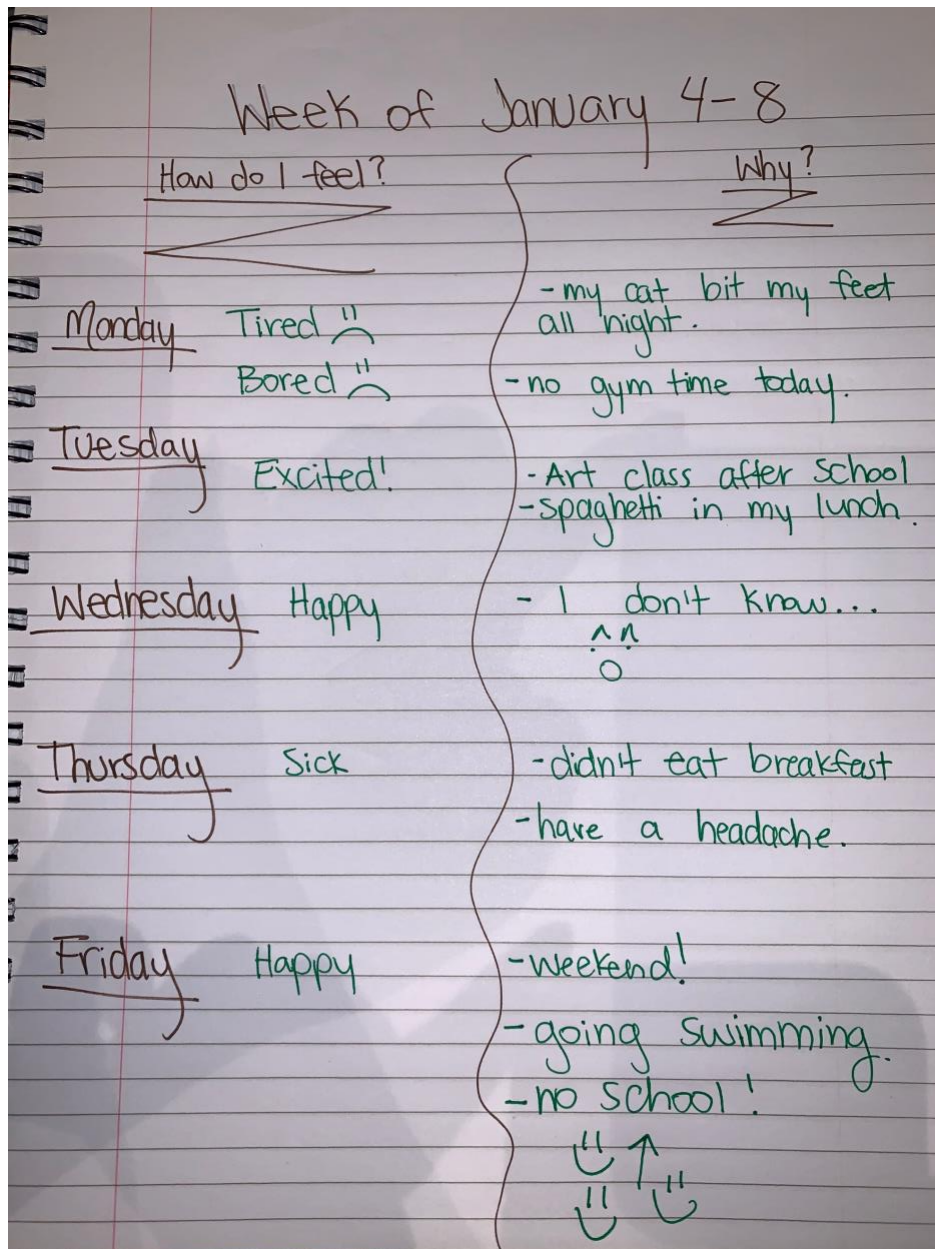
When assessing a written response in the wellness journal, it is important to look for connections to changes in thinking, or the curriculum. This student has completed the required prompt, but has also gone back to connect their original ideas to the whole self. They have also briefly connected their idea to the medicine wheel. Depending how your class chooses to assess the journals, this student has taken the time to go back and document their change in thinking.

#### Activity Reflection:



Webs are an example of how students can reflect on an activity. After a field trip, a quiz, a walk, or even a lunchtime students can jot down notes about how they feel. Again, this student has chosen to go back and reflect on this activity at a later date.

Daily Feelings/Wellness Log:



A wellness log can be done daily, for example each morning. It can be simple, or follow a template. This can be an excellent way to show patterns in feelings, and have students reflect on possibilities for why they are feeling this way. It is important to scaffold, and have a list of feelings ready to encourage deeper reflection.

Other examples located in the brainstorm section of my website. You could include:

- Pictures of Student Work
- Gratitude Lists
- Sketches
- Restorative Reflections

- Responses to Prompts
- Mood Logs
- Nutrition Logs
- Exercise Logs

### ***Giving Feedback and Assessing Journals***

Students need to know what success looks like, where their learning is at and what they need to do to improve (Friesen et al., 2015). This is where ongoing feedback and challenging students comes in to play.

Ongoing assessment of the journals will come in the form of feedback, from peers and from the teacher. Ideally, teachers would meet one on one with students periodically to conference about the progress of the journal, and the students understanding of wellness. The student and teacher may refer to the co-created rubric to show where a student is at, and what they can do to move forward or reflect more deeply.

It is important that we don't diminish any student reflection, as all reflection is valuable. However, it is essential that there is some structure for journals, as well as frequent entries and feedback to ensure the students stay on track. Due to the nature of the unit being embedded throughout all disciplines of study, it is possible that this wellness journal will be in place of a daily journal, or portfolio. Any and all information, reflection and student work is important to have on hand to show growth.

Students will be asked to return to previous journal pages and add notes, discuss with peers or teacher about their new knowledge. Has their thinking changed? How? Do they understand something about how they were feeling more deeply now?

Teachers will assess journals holistically using the rubric as a guide. These journals are personal, individual and are included to track student growth, progress and understanding throughout the semester. Once in a routine, students should enjoy this reflection process, and understand what they need to do to ensure it is their best work. Students should be given opportunities to:

- Share their work with others
- Select pieces to be assessed
- Discuss their journals with an adult
- Go back to previous entries
- Showcase their journal when desired (ex: gallery walk, on display)

### ***Sample Journal Rubric***

Classes should spend time co-creating what they would like their journal to look like. How often should they write in it? Should they do a quick entry every day? Track their mood? How often



should they look back and add to entries? This will be decided as a class, but here is a sample rubric that could be used as a starting point.

You also could take the time to co-create a list or web answering the question: What does a strong reflection have? This could be displayed in the classroom.

	<b>Beginning →</b>	<b>Developing →</b>	<b>Applying →</b>	<b>Extending →</b>
<b>Completion</b> Has the student completed the required entries?	Student rarely writes in the journal, and when they do it is often incomplete.	Student attempts to complete some journal activities, but contributes the minimum amount.	Student completes most or all of the journal entries.	Student completes all journal entries, contributes to journal on their own time, and often reviews previous journals.
<b>Organization</b> Have students taken the time to date, title or describe the activity in their journal?	Students never have a date or title on their journal. They may be out of order and hard to follow.	Students sometimes have a date or title. Journals may not be in order.	Journals usually have a date, title or description and are in order. They are easy to follow and look back on.	The journal always has a date, description, and may include page numbers. Students are organized, and may refer to certain pages within their reflections.
<b>Effort</b> Has the student done the work to the best of their ability? Has the student been able to select or share a piece of the journal that is meaningful to them?	The student rarely completes or adds to journal, so it is challenging to see their effort.	Student works to complete their journal, but may find it challenging to put effort in. They may be unable to select a piece of work that is their best.	Student takes pride in their journal entries, and can identify a strong piece of work.	Student takes pride in their entries, and are visibly passionate about sharing their growth. They show excitement when sharing a piece of work, and can identify why it is a strong piece.

<b>Continuous Growth</b> Has the student gone back to reflect on previous journals? Do the entries show a change in thinking?	Student does not complete journals, so they are unable to reflect on previous pieces of work.	Student will go back to previous journals and add to them, but only when asked. They may just add more details, rather than challenge or add to their reflection.	Students consistently return to old entries, sharing new knowledge or challenging their previous ideas. They may do this without being asked.	Student always completes required reflections on previous entries, and returns to read or add deeper thinking, questions, or more notes to previous entries. Their journal clearly shows shifts in thinking.
<b>Reflection Depth</b> Have students considered multiple aspects when responding to a prompt? Do they include feedback from peers? Have they included samples of work, sketches, brainstorm, details etc?	Student does not complete journals, so depth of reflection is challenging to assess.	Students usually respond or add to the required prompt, but may struggle to connect their thoughts to classroom activities or exploration. They may produce a surface level reflection with detail, but may not answer the "how", or "why" in their response.	Students show deeper level thinking, incorporating knowledge or detail from experiences, discussions with peers etc. They frequently connect their ideas to the classroom, and their outside lives. They answer the "how" or "why" in their response, and may include pictures, sketches or other small notes to enhance their entry.	Students consistently go above and beyond in their reflections, adding new insight to knowledge or experiences from the classroom. They are able to connect their ideas of wellness to the community and outside world. They always incorporate feedback, discussion points or extra detail to enhance their entry.