



## EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Mrs. Johnson's fifth grade students have been learning about the rainforest ecosystem and rainforest scientists. They have investigated the ways that scientists share their findings with others through various kinds of informational texts, including field guides, research notes, interviews and field journals. For several weeks, they've been carefully reading *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World*, an informational text about the work of entomologist Meg Lowman. Now her students were ready to practice writing like scientists.

To help students envision what their field journal entry should look like, Mrs. Johnson first showed her class several field journals as models. Then, with much fanfare, she gave the students their own field journals (simple notebooks she had created by folding and stapling unlined paper into booklets), and launched the field journal project by going outside to observe the maple tree that grow in the small patch of grass in front of the school building. They took careful notes (words and pictures), observing carefully and noticing precise details. Throughout, students honed their writing skills through homework in which they observed nature (backyards, local parks, or through their window) and took notes in their field journals.

Next, Mrs. Johnson helped students connect their journaling to the content of the rainforest. She returned to *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World*, the anchor text students; she asked students to create field journal entries from Meg Lowman's point of view. This gave students practice writing first person narratives using sensory details while also challenging them to incorporate text-based evidence into their writing.

Students had become stronger writers of narrative; but they needed to develop research skills so they could build knowledge about the rainforest. She taught them how to take notes by recording direct quotes and paraphrasing, and how to sort notes into topical categories. Then she split the class into two expert groups: one focused on rainforest ants, one on butterflies. Each group was heterogeneous, so she students could support each other as she rotated between the two groups. Students practiced their research skills using a variety of resources (including texts, videos, and graphics). Midway, Mrs. Johnson assessed their proficiency with note-taking by giving them unfamiliar texts about a different rainforest species: the howler monkey.

Having gathered enough information, students were ready to write their own field journal entry from the point of view a rainforest scientist. Mrs. Johnson showed them model rainforest explorer field journal entries (from *Rainforest Research Journal* by Paul Mason), and the class then co-created a rubric for their final product that outlined requirements for Ideas, Organization and Language (i.e. sensory details, precise scientific language and chronological organization). The class noticed that field journals often contain labeled drawings and informational text boxes, so planned to include these elements in their final products.

Students worked diligently on their final products, pausing to refine their work through self-reflection, peer review, and teacher feedback, all based on the criteria from the rubric they created. They gave each other specific praise, suggestions, and questions to help each other improve, focusing on the scientific accuracy of the information they included. When their field journals were completed, each student had a beautiful final product that they proudly shared with friends and families during a culminating Celebration of Learning.

To see how much of this learning students could demonstrate independently, Mrs. Johnson ended the module with a final on-demand assessment task. Students returned to their notes about howler monkeys during the mid-unit assessment and, without assistance, turn those notes into a field journal entry featuring the howler monkey (rather than ants or butterflies).