

# Ty Ankrom's Here's What I Think ...

It's interesting what activities can benefit students.

A few years ago, there was a movement — and rightly so — for children to engage in unstructured play. Specifically, thanks to Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, child advocates wanted kids to return to playing outside.

Unstructured play encourages teamwork, problem solving and creativity. Studies have shown that those skills then help children in a structured classroom environment.

In past columns I've cited statistics about the benefits of gratitude and keeping a gratitude journal. A 2011 study found that people who spent 15 minutes or more writing down grateful sentiments in a journal before bed slept longer and deeper.

In fact, when I was in high school, my sophomore English teacher made journal writing a requirement. Our entries were not so much of a flow, but daily entries. The activity was despised by most. However, we all came away as much better writers.

While this high school assignment improved my writing skills, studies have found that journaling overall can improve physical and mental health.

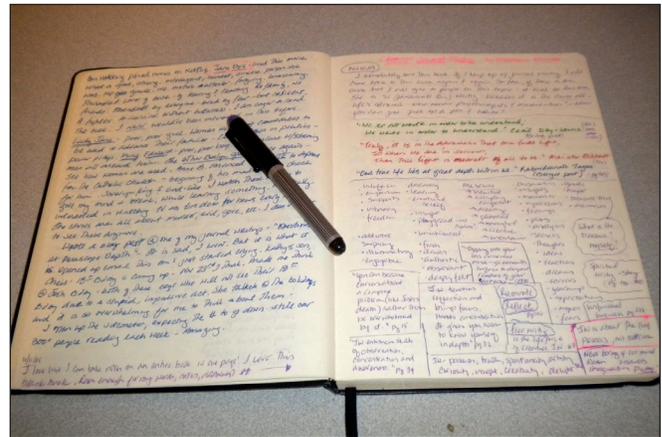
James W. Pennebaker, a social psychologist at the University of Texas at Austin, said in a 2018 *New York Times* article that journaling, by its nature, helps "organize an event ... and make sense of trauma."

For young people, journaling can improve social-emotional learning.

Susanna Palomares, author of *The Inside Story: Self-Esteem and Self Awareness for Kids*, writes, "Journal writing is a vehicle for building self-awareness, personal insight and self-esteem, and is an excellent means of developing language skills, creativity and imagination.



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"Verbal skills, reading comprehension, and written expression are developed through regular writing, while journal drawing stimulates visual thinking and perceiving.

Journaling can be beneficial for all ages. Some English teachers at Pickaway-Ross Career & Technology Center use it in their classes.

Katie Hewitt said she uses it as a focus activity for students, encouraging them to devote a short period of time "to turn off outside noise and prepare to 'English,' as I call it."

Katie said the exercise helps her assess her students' progress and understanding.

"It also helps me get to know them. They tell me things in their journals that I would never have known otherwise," Katie said.

Whatever the age, author Palomares said journaling can encourage students to express private feelings.

"Journaling can help students process emotions and move forward."

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