Essential Questions

What is place?
Why is place important to me? (as a fourth grader)

Standards Addressed

4-LS1-1: Plants and animals have internal and external structures that function to support survival, growth, behavior, and reproduction.

S3-4:48: Students demonstrate their understanding of Processes and Change over Time within Earth Systems by observing, recording and analyzing local weather data and making predictions based on that data.

S3-4:49 Students demonstrate their understanding of Processes and Change within Natural Resources by observing and describing properties of living and nonliving resources.
Understanding

❖ Vermont is a unique state. Having a knowledge of the trees, seasons, natural resources, weather patterns, etc., we can better understand the world around us.

Students will:

❖ Connect personally in a meaningful way to the Vermont landscape through:
  ➢ Journal entries
  ➢ Written observations
  ➢ Detailed drawings demonstrating the use of close observation
  ➢ Knowledge of local plant and animal species
  ➢ Understanding Vermont’s natural resources
  ➢ Fostering a sense of place through regular journaling opportunities

❖ Connect to their local community by:
➢ Developing a page in a field guide with a focus on one plant, animal or mineral found on our nature trail
➢ Distributing the compiled field guide to each classroom and encouraging teachers and students to visit our nature trail

**Performance Task:**

**September:** An introduction to nature journals, observations, & trees with Susan Sawyer. (See right)

October: Using our senses on the nature trail. How to be still and focused in our magic spots. Observation. Write a short narrative of a day on the nature trail. (See example below)

November: How to sketch and label leaves, seeds, or other interesting things we see on the nature trail with **detail**. How to ID specimens in field guides. Record entries & observations on our class blog.

December: Discovering poetry and simile on the nature trail. A focus on finding a sense of place through writing and seeing ‘with thoughtful eyes’.

January: Tracking. Perhaps ask Lynn Levine to join the class for a day of tracking. Bring nature journals with us to Billings Farm.

February: Trees in the winter. Winter weeds.

March: Phenology. Look closely at the changes we see occurring on the nature trail. What is driving these changes?

April: Plants. Choose something (plant or animal) to create a field guide page & reflective/ place-based page about. To be completed by the end of April. Compiled, this will be our class field guide which will be shared with all classrooms.

May: Trees in the spring. Continuation of the field guide project. Students took this project a step further and created a website entitled: A Field Guide to Our Nature Trail. This website consisted of all student’s research and allowed them to meet some technology standards.
Ongoing:

Students visited our nature trail once or twice each week. Some days there were specific prompts, other times, they were asked to choose between writing or sketching. I had great success with open writing/ thinking / sitting times on the nature trail.

Aside from nature journaling, we committed to weekly lessons on Vermont’s landscape. These lessons were somewhat linked to my UVLEL project and be crafted to intentionally fit into our nature journaling and sense of place discover, but in some cases, there was merely a nice overlap between our curriculum and this ongoing project. In fourth grade, we study Vermont. Vermont history. Vermont landscape. Vermont maps. This year, I was thrilled to be working with my grade level partner more closely on sustainability and linking it to our study of Vermont. Together, we worked with our students on topics of sustainability and place. My UVLEL unit joined perfectly with our attempt to make the 4th grade curriculum as sustainable and place-based as possible.

Assessment:

Assessment for this project was both informal and ongoing, and summative.
  ❖ Student nature journals were shared with the class. They were also read by me. Students and myself wrote notes on stickies as a way to provide informal feedback to our fourth grade community.
  ❖ The application of in-class lessons, commitment to journaling, overall engagement, etc. was reflected in the science section of student report cards.
  ❖ Field guide pieces were graded and scored in the writing section of student report cards.
  ❖ Field guide pieces also were placed in student’s writing portfolios as exemplars of their work.

Materials:

  ❖ Field guides! I purchased many new, beautiful field guides. Students loved learning from these, and we used them often during our classroom lessons.
  ❖ Blank journals
  ❖ *Nice* mechanical pencils (this helped student recognize the importance of our journaling time and made it extra special)
  ❖ Cushions (for keep our bottoms warm even while outside journaling in the winter months)