

## Teaching Tips

### (Your) County Almanac

Stephan P. Carlson

**Goal:** To observe and record the natural events that are happening in your area.

**Subjects:** Science, social studies, English.

**Grade Levels:** 5-12.

**Materials:** Field guides for birds, insects, mammals, flowers, weeds, grasses, reptiles, amphibians, etc.

*A Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold.

Map of your local region.

Calendar.

Thermometer.

Watch.

**Background:** "With his mother's opera glasses and a canister for collecting plants, Aldo would ride the streetcar to the end of the line and disappear into the woods. Often as not he carried his shotgun and a notebook, the beginnings of his prolific and literate journals."

—*National Geographic*, Nov. 1981.

Leopold was a keen observer and wrote extensively about his observations and thoughts. He kept detailed journals, and asked his students to do so. Clay Schoenfeld, a well-known Wisconsin journalist, was a Wisconsin high school student in 1934 when he volunteered for a conservation club project led by Leopold. He kept a journal that summer, and over 30 years later wrote about the encouragement to "perceive" that he received from Leopold. "We weren't simply to be field hands; we were to observe, to ask questions, to try to put things together; in short, to 'perceive' as he later called it. We were to begin to practice 'deep digging' for facts, yet we were not to be blind to natural beauty."

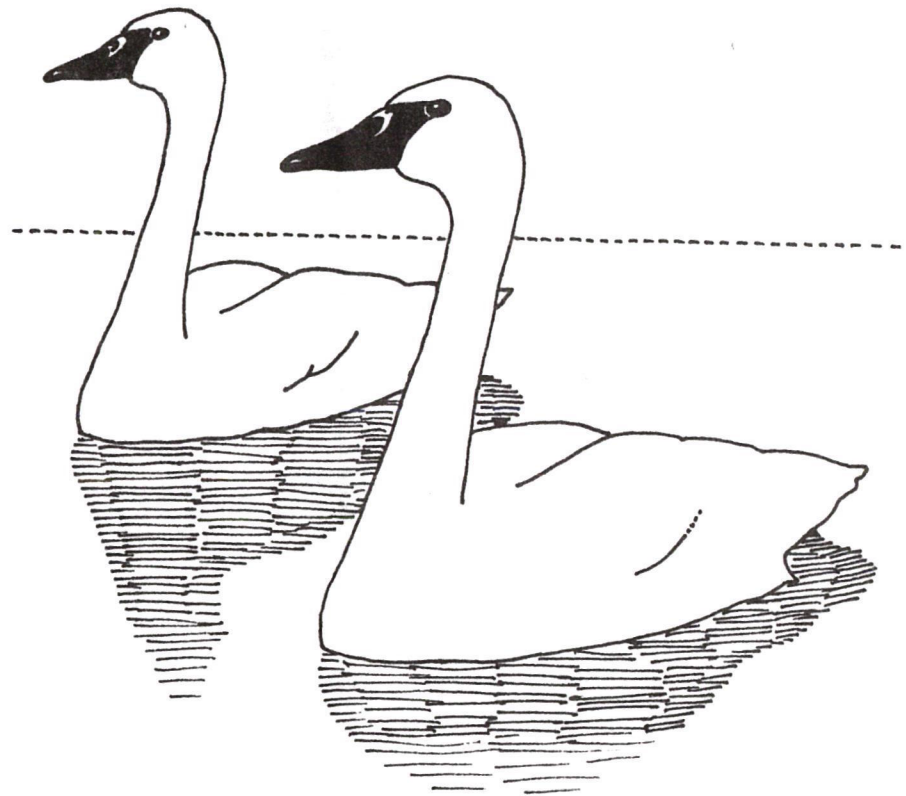
Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* was to become his most famous collection of natural history observations and thoughts.

**Procedure:** 1. Ask students: What is an almanac?

2. Read all or part of *A Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold. Why do you think Aldo Leopold called his book, *A Sand County Almanac*?

3. Leopold was an expert in phenology and spent many hours pursuing this study. What is phenology? What does a phenologist do?

4. You, too can be a phenologist. Create your own almanac! On a daily basis, observe and record the natural events that are happening in your yard, park, community, or county. Take note of both obvious and subtle changes that occur throughout the year. For example, note the first sign of autumn color on a familiar tree, the first snowfall of the season, the day the ice breaks up on a local pond, the blooming of a dandelion in the spring, and the return of a migratory songbird.



5. Share results of your phenological study with other interested individuals and organizations. Much useful and important information can be obtained from such records. Leopold greatly admired the contributions to the field of ornithology made by a woman who studied song sparrows in her neighborhood. Ask your local nature center, National Audubon Society Chapter, university natural resources researchers, Department of Natural Resources biologists, or county Extension personnel for recommendations about how you can make your information useful to research projects.

Stephan P. Carlson is Director of Maywood Environmental Park in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Reprinted from *EE News* (February 1987), published by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. ANSS Board Member Anne C. Hallowell is Editor of *EE News*.

Teaching Tips are a service of the American Nature Study Society.