

Out and About with Preschoolers: Close Up with Visual Arts



Children love spending time outdoors, especially when the weather is nice! They notice beauty around them. The world outdoors is the perfect setting for hands-on visual arts activities that bring children close to nature!

Beauty on a small scale

- When the class is sitting outside, ask, “What makes something seem beautiful to you?” “What are some very small things that you would call beautiful?” Offer a few examples of your own if children are having trouble thinking of ideas.
- Before going outside, be aware of any children’s allergies or sensitivities to leaves or plants. Invite children to collect several small items that they feel are beautiful or appealing: pebbles, acorns, leaves, twigs, pieces of bark. Only collect items that have already fallen to the ground and are not part of a person’s private property or yard. (NOTE: Be sure no noxious plants are nearby.)
- Indoors, the children can arrange their collections in ways that they think are beautiful. Photograph the arrangements and display the photographs in the classroom. Label each photograph with the child’s name and a caption that they dictate. Later, the class can return the items to where they were found.

Sketches revisited

- This project is best done over two or more days. Show the children a book, such as Thomas Locker’s *Sky Tree*, in which the artist focuses on changes in a single object. Invite children to make observational drawings of objects that they select outdoors. Provide drawing pencils, paper, and clipboards or other portable hard flat surfaces.
- Make two photocopies of each drawing. Give each child one of their copies. (Keep the original and the other copy.) Provide crayons, pastels, chalk, colored pencils, and watercolors. Invite children to “revisit” their copies to add color and other details that they saw but did not put in their original drawings.
- Give children their second copies. This time, let them add details that they imagine but did not see. It may be helpful to model this step for children who have trouble thinking of additional details.
- Display each set of three pictures together and ask each child to dictate captions.

Photograms or “fade pictures”

- Give each child a piece of light-sensitive paper or construction paper that fades in sunlight. Help them anchor the papers on a flat surface in direct sunlight. Children can arrange flowers, twigs, rocks, and other collected items on their papers. (Do this activity on a day without much wind!)
- After several hours, ask the children to check the progress of their photograms. (NOTE: Some colors of paper fade more readily than others. Test the paper ahead of time to see how long it takes to fade.)

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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