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Art in Nature

Subject Area: Humanities

Core Curriculum Content Standards: 1.1.A & B, 1.2.D, 1.3.D, 1.4.A & B,
1.5.A & B, 3.3.A, 3.4.A

Session Description

Art is a visual expression of a person's thoughts, ideas, or words. It is often inspired by a certain sight or particular experience where a person has dealt with life's elements and situations, including those that have been funny, thrilling, and inspiring, as well as painful or unacceptable. It is a combination of freedom of self-expression with the disciplined techniques required for precise visualization of such expression.

This lesson begins with conducting several sensory-awareness activities. They are designed to intensify students' recognition of their surroundings for features like: shapes and sizes, colors, shadows, textures, distance perspectives, as well as objects/scenes that they find beautiful, interesting, strange, or ugly.

In the field, students are guided on an outdoor hike, which culminates in fine art expression. During the hike attention is given to natural elements on the SOC campus within Stokes State forest. At appropriate sites, students may make natural element arrangements; do a sketch of the site; and utilize one medium, such as charcoal, craypas, or watercolors.

Objectives

Students will become more sensitive to and aware of their surroundings, including people and all other life forms in it, especially in the selected sketching and painting site(s).
Students will express what they have observed using various art media.

Materials

SOC supplies for the class include:

quality paper in a variety of sizes: (full scene, postcard, bookmark size)	scrap paper for sketching, mixing colors, etc.
water color paint sets	paintbrushes of all sizes
charcoal	natural "paintbrushes" (rocks, twigs, branches ¹)
Cray pas	sponges
pencils & colored pencils	large plastic container of water
packets of laminated art work samples showing period styles of the past two centuries of art movements	plastic water cups for students
	easels (legal size clipboards)
	newspaper to cover and protect surface areas

Procedures - Section 1

The following sensory-awareness activities, taken from SOC's *Perceptual Awareness* lesson plan could be incorporated into the introduction section of the *Art in Nature* lesson. (If students are also scheduled for the *Perceptual Awareness* class, confirm which of the following activities are not being used during *Perceptual Awareness*.)

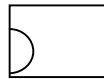
Solve the Mystery – Natural objects of various shapes and textures are in cloth bags. The students will feel one object, or each object, then guess what it is. They describe the way it feels, verbally or in writing. They can also draw the mystery object as accurately as they can just by handling it.

¹ Please do not destroy plants when collecting natural bushes. Point out the available supply that has already fallen on the forest floor.

Make Friends with a Tree – Use the technique from Acclimatization (Van Matre, 1972) entitled: “Find Your Friend in the Forest.” Pair up the students and blindfold one of the pair. The blindfolded student is spun around to be disoriented, and is then led to a tree which s/he must investigate thoroughly. *Feel the tree’s skin. Is it smooth or rough? Is there anything growing on it? How wide is the tree at your head height? At your knee level?* After a full investigation, the student is led back to the starting point. Spin the student once more, take off their blindfold, and have him/her go out to find their tree. Observations can be recorded in their journals. Have them switch partners and do it again.

One of a Kind – Distribute one particular type of leaf or a rock to each person. Tell them they must familiarize themselves with their item so that they can pick it out of a pile of similar ones. Give them time to become acquainted with their item, then compile all of them together, with some additional ones mixed in. Each student must find his or her rock or leaf.

Improving Focusing Ability – Use cardboard sighting tubes (empty paper towel rolls) or the following handmade device, to telescope in on one object: fold a piece of 8^{1/2} X 11 paper into quarters. Snip one corner off with a semi circular cutting pattern. After you open the paper, it could function as a “telescope.”



Hold handmade tool close to your eye and see the full panorama view. Slowly move paper away from eye to observe details. Then pull it back. Do it several times. Compare what you see in the distance (skyline, blanket forest growth, sun, birds in flight) with immediate sightings (around your feet, by the nearest rock, tree, plant, or person). Which do you like best? Ask them to explain their partiality. Select a favorite distance, then sketch and paint the sight.

Cloud Gazing – Take students to an open view area, such as the Corral. Ask them to lie down on the grass, if possible. Suggest that they consider the shapes of the cloud patterns and what they bring to mind - animals, people, objects, and events. Have students consider the variety of colors, shapes, and shadows, in a “white” cloud.

Un-nature Trail – Take the students into the area where you have set up the “Unnatural Trail,” before class began. Have them form a single file line and instruct them to walk down the trail in silence until they reach the end. (Space them so that they are at least four feet apart.) They are to stay on the trail, take a mental count of how many objects, not native to a forest area, can be seen. They are not to point to objects or give any hint of discovery if they see them. When they reach the end of the trail, they are to tell how many objects they have seen. When every student has done this, select one student at a time to slowly walk through the area, pick up one object, and show the site where it was found.

Photography / Awareness Walk – Select a set of laminated photographs of SOC buildings and sites, either the set for the Sequoia side of the lake or for the Wapalanne side of the lake. Give each student a photo. Take the group on a quiet walk through the site area. Ask them to observe their surroundings as they walk. Have them stop the group when they sight the object(s) in their photo. (*Answer Key* map included in the photograph set.)

Procedures² - Section 2

1. **Schools of Painting** – Show students the copies of renowned artists’ works stored in SOC’s *Art in Nature* supply crates. They represent artistic movements. Discuss styles and ask students to express their reactions to them.

1. **Select a sketch site.**

If students choose to paint a close-up view or a still life, visualization of these can be enhanced by using several techniques including:

- overlapping shapes in the scene;

² Procedures have been arranged in a deliberate chronological order. Try to follow them, if possible, to foster student sensitivity, increased awareness of surroundings, and necessary painting process stages for expression of them.

- choosing to make shapes either sharp or fuzzy;
- lightening or darkening selected areas;
- using only one medium such as charcoal or a selected piece of pastel chalk;
- using only one water color.

If students want to try painting a larger, open landscape scene, they need to notice:

- the size of objects;
- the brightness of color based on the objects' closeness, or dimness of colors because of their distance from the observer;
- the objects' distance: if objects are close, they must be lower in the sketch, and if they are distant, they must be positioned in a higher area of the paper;
- that distant objects "meet" as they recede in space;
- that warm colors like red, orange and yellow cause a scene to seem like it is moving forward;
- that cool colors, especially green and blue, cause the scene to seem like it is receding;
- that an illusion of distance can be created by using two figures in the scene, one large and the other, small;
- that the nearness of an object is emphasized by making it dark, and its distance, by making it light;
- how rough sketches or silhouettes foster a sense of distance, while great detail brings the viewer closer to the scene.

1. Sketching considerations to be discussed with students:³

Help students prepare for sketching by suggesting the following procedure, or actually doing a small scale version of it while they look on, if possible. An alternate possibility would be to show examples of art work given to SOC by previous visiting teachers and students at SOC.

- notice the three zones of landscape: foreground, middle ground, and background;
- select one, two or all three of them for painting;
- sketch major site(s) in the scene;
- add important shapes;
- add fine details.

When drawing animals, including people, focus on and sketch in the following order:

- shoulder to hip area first;
- legs, arms, neck, and head;
- and last, feet and hands.

1. After sketching the desired scene, students can practice the following watercolor exercises, as needed, before they paint:

- Brush strokes and their effects – elements to consider:
 - flat bristle brushes are good for large wash areas, e.g. water;
 - a wet brush will cause paint to have a more pulpy effect;
 - pointy brushes are useful for thin light strokes;
- Potential brush strokes and arm movement – have students practice the following brush strokes and notice their visual effects:
 - hold a paint brush in hand and move: just the hand/ full arm/ waist to arm to hand, with a quick movement change of direction (up, across, and down);
 - fling paint, which gives a spattered look on paper, similar to the splash of a bird landing in water;
 - grip firmly for a solid shape or gently for a flowing effect;
 - Use slow speed for defined lines, or fast strokes for a wispy effect.

³ If students prefer drawing exclusively from their imagination, encourage that as well.

- Give direct brush strokes on paper with a toothbrush, or create the spatter effect by running a fingertip nail across brush bristles.
- Dip a dry brush *lightly* into paint and use for: adding texture to a wet surface; separating color lines for tree bark; painting filament plants such as grass; giving brush strokes useful for showing animal fur.
- Alternate thin strokes with thick strokes.
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c. Practicing with color: **Please remind students to rinse brush off before dipping it into a new color.** On their scrap paper “palettes,” have students paint one small circle in red. While still wet, quickly add more red and watch color darken. Make a new red paint circle and add blue. Watch color turn → purple. Make four new red circles, continue this process, and add one color to each circle: add orange and make → burnt orange; add yellow and get → rusty orange; add brown to produce → earthy brown; add black and get → burgundy. Have students try this process with any other color they are interested in. Ask them to label favored combinations, so that they can formulate more of it when painting their picture.

d. Painting on a surface area that has been wet with water causes a flow of color. Painting on dry paper gives a more defined image. Have students try practicing two possible approaches: wet half of a piece of scrap paper and paint a simple colored shape, such as a yellow circle for the sun. On the other dry half, do a similar sun shape and compare the effect.

e. Seven varying techniques and their possible effects on watercolor art work:

1. **Sharp edge movement** – Run a bent paper clip or pointy rock over selected area(s) of the paper. Paint and create, for example, tree trunk lines or grooves on branches. The porous, scratched line area will absorb more color. Such scratch marks generally produce finer lines and increase texture effect. For a larger textured-area effect, a rough rock could be stroked in one direction, or strokes could even be crisscrossed, and paint could be applied over it. Avoid such strokes in water areas, where a smooth surface is more useful for achieving a mirror-like reflection of nearby objects.
2. **Wet-into wet painting** – Saturate paper with clean water using a large brush or sponge. Brush, spatter or flip paint on. It makes colors fuse, mix, and unique patterns result. Paper can be crumpled in the wetting stage and then painted. It gives a weblike effect. This technique is good for soft texture areas, as well as areas with mixed colors. Use sponges to lift out a cloud shape.
3. **Wash technique** – Give watercolor painting more substance by slanting paper slightly and painting horizontal strokes. Overlap the strokes and work downwards. Squeeze out brush tip to pick up the remaining droplets of paint on the lowest section of that color area. OR *Graduated wash technique*– Start with a dark wash and add clean water and try working downward. Last strokes are pure water. Do the reverse starting with a light color. (Useful for showing changes in light such as sunrise, sunset, moonrise, and moonset. It is also a good technique for showing surface.)
4. **Silhouette shapes** – For practice, have students sketch their initials with significant space between an inner and outer line for each letter. Start with a dark wash outside the immediate edge of the letter and add water periodically. Lightest area should meet the outer border of the paper. A similar process could be applied to actual student sketches, or to natural samples such as leaves and rocks, that students have laid on their sketch paper.
4. **Line effect in art work** – Alternate a dark color with a light color either in curved or straight lines based on site or object.
6. **Resistant wax background** – Crayon coloring can be used when utilizing this technique for painting appropriate site areas. For example, when painting waves caused by air currents on Lake Wapalanne, a light gray or white crayon can be used to draw ripple lines, circles, and/or irregular blotches on selected sections of the lake area.

After doing that, a paintbrush can be dragged across the entire lake area. Watercolor will only penetrate the un-crayoned areas of the lake, causing the desired light/dark wave effect.

7. **The mix technique** – Crayons, pastels, charcoal, etc. can all be utilized on the same work. Mixing such media causes a new surface texture that reflects light and dark in a different manner. It is also a way of creating new shades of colors for blending, subduing, or highlighting effects. Watercolors are also good in this procedure, both under or over the other mediums.
8. **Alternative painting instruments** – Use fingers, pine cones, pine needles, tree bark, etc. as painting instruments.

Summary

Have students gather together. Ask them to share thoughts about their experience of both the forest and artistic expression of it in their paintings. Honesty is encouraged. If they found the activity boring, have them explain why. If they enjoyed it, ask for details.

Suggest that they consider the future of their painted scenes or sketches if, for example, a business company managed to dispose of a dangerous waste that might seep into Lake Wapalanne. Have them describe its effect on the plants and animals in their scene, and what a future painting might reflect. Older students might bring this topic up earlier in the class and decide to paint an impressionist version of the lake, one reflecting such pollution damage to the site.

Encourage students to enjoy the land, appreciate it, protect it, preserve it, and allow it to continue its natural processes. The activities may inspire them to be willing to help in maintaining its character for future artists to interpret.

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Lesson Contributors

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