

A Closer Look

“Everywhere we look, complex magic of nature blazes before our eyes.” –Vincent van Gogh

Background Information:

Bin Information

This lesson is second in a series of three nature art activities. It is preceded by “Ephemeral Nature Art” where students use natural materials to create a temporary piece of art. In this lesson, students will use several art exercises to observe nature closely and self-evaluate if their overall perception changes based on it. It is followed by “Art for Action” in which students design an art installation to share information or promote a cause.

Because one of the focuses of this lesson is observation, it also pairs well with the phenology bin; particularly the nature journaling activity.

Materials and Set-Up:

You will need:

- Paper
- Drawing supplies (colored pencils, crayons, markers, etc.)
- Magnifying glasses
- Paint Chips
- Clipboards

Set-Up:

- Find an outdoor location where students will have access to several different types of trees to observe and other natural materials. Check the area before hand to be aware of potential hazards and determine boundaries to set if applicable.

Introduction:

Estimated Duration: 10 minutes

Attention Getter

Any established group or classroom attention-getters can be used to regain the attention of the students when giving directions for transitioning activities. If you choose to use an attention-getter personalized to this lesson, introduce the following before introducing the lesson:

- The instructor calls out “Artists!”
- The students call back “Creating!”

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Parts of this lesson were adapted from “The Closer You Look” from Project Learning Tree

Themes:

Exploration, magnification, observation, art

Estimated Duration:

60 minutes

Audience Identified:

3rd-5th grade

Can be adapted for older or younger students

Location:

Access to several different types of trees. The lesson can take place entirely outside or start out in a classroom.

Goal:

Students will use intentional observation to improve their art skills and knowledge of nature.

Objectives:

Students will draw a tree without reference.

Students will perform short observational exercises.

Students will draw a tree with reference.

Students will identify differences in their art before and after focusing on specific observations of a subject.

Warm Up

As the warm up for this lesson, hand out a piece of paper for each student. Alternatively, if students have a journal or notebook for a similar purpose they can use a page from that.

Tell students that they will have 10 minutes to draw a tree. They can choose the type of tree, though it should be one that grows in the area. They can choose from the drawing materials that are available and plan a level of detail that is appropriate for having ten minutes to complete the image.

For this warm up students should be drawing without a reference, so you may need to plan a location accordingly. Give students time to work, with a warning when they are low on time.

After the time is up, have students file the drawing away for the end of the lesson. Transition outdoors.

Content and Methods:

Estimated Duration: 30 minutes

Once outdoors explain a few possible activities for students. You may choose to have them rotate through each, or choose which ones that they would like to work through at their own pace. Start by giving an overview of all activities.

Below each activity some examples of guiding questions are listed that you can ask students as they explore.

Color Match

Hand out paint chips and have students find some object in the area that matches that color. Students can start with 'easier' colors to match such as earth tones, and then move on to rarer, brighter colors. They may be surprised at just how many colors that they are able to find.

Students can also perform the reverse of the activity where they first find an item in nature, for example, a fallen leaf, and then attempt to find the color that matches most exactly.

Drawing utensils can also be used for color matching. (ex. Hand out different crayons from a box and have students find objects to match the crayon shade.)

- Are there more colors than you were expecting?
- Are there any shades that surprise you, or aren't what they first seem?

Nature Rubbings

Give students a blank sheet of paper, a crayon, and a flat surface such as a clipboard or journal.

For best results, lay the object on a flat surface and put the most textured part of the object up; for a leaf this would be vein side up. Use a dark color of crayon, remove the paper wrapping and rub firmly with the side of the crayon. This activity works best with objects that have a mild relief, but students can also experiment and try their hand with different textures as well, such as the bark of a tree.

- What patterns or textures worked best with the nature rubbings?
- Where there any textures that surprised you when you saw them with the crayon instead of in their original form?

Close Ups

Hand out magnifying glasses or hand lenses to students. They then can use them to examine specific parts of trees and draw sketches of various parts of the plants magnified; for example, close ups of the bark, leaves, seeds, or flowers. Have students also make some comparisons, such as drawing a close up of the bark of one tree versus a different species.

What did you notice when looking at only a small part?

If you saw a photo of only a close up of one of these trees, do you think that you could match it to the right one?

Fifteen second sketches

For this activity, students will need a partner. They should choose a location where they can see several trees from one vantage point. Then, the first student will choose one of the trees and draw a very quick sketch of it in fifteen seconds or less (the time frame can be adjusted but should be brief). The other student will then attempt to guess which tree the first was sketching based off the completed sketch. The students should go back and forth a few times taking turns drawing and guessing.

- What were challenges to trying to capture the impression of a tree very quickly?
- What could you observe about form (the shape of the tree) that helped make it recognizable to other people?

Conclusion:

Estimated Duration: 10 minutes

Have each student pick a tree (as similar as possible to the tree that they drew without reference) to observe and draw again, paying close attention to as many specific details as possible.

To conclude the lesson, students will be drawing another picture of a tree with the same time frame that they had to draw the first one. This time, they will find one of the trees outside to draw specifically and observe as a reference while sketching it. If possible, it is ideal if it is the same type of tree that they drew in the introduction of the lesson, but this is not necessary. They may also use any of the drawings they created during the lesson as reference as well. As before, they can pick the drawing materials from those available and plan a level of detail appropriate for the time allotted.

Reflection and Evaluation:

Estimated Duration: 10 minutes

Reflection

After finishing the second drawing, the students should take some time to compare the first and last drawing they made to each other. Ask the following questions as prompts.

- Do the drawings look the same or different? If they are different, what changed?
- Did anything in their thought process when they were drawing change? If so, what?
- If they were going to make a third drawing of the same tree, is there anything that they would wish to do to prepare for that drawing?

Evaluation

Evaluation for this lesson will take place in the reflection portion. Students will self-evaluate based on comparing the two tree drawings that they completed. Students will be considered successful in this lesson if they participated throughout the whole activity and are able to answer the questions posed in the reflection portion. These answers can be given out loud if sharing as a group, or jotted down and turned in to the teacher as an exit ticket.

Extensions:

Accessibility and Accommodation

Distance Learning: A shortened seesaw version of this lesson can be found at

https://app.seesaw.me/pages/shared_activity?share_token=juLmXMvNR92Ly21Ja8Yc9g&prompt_id=prompt.b46a908e-da6c-4a1e-8d08-f3e8eb2eb9b5

Tie-in to Other Content Areas

In this lesson plan, drawings of trees are used to bookend the activity. Other relevant subjects can be substituted for trees; for example, if spring wildflowers are blooming and being studied, having students draw pictures of flowers can be used instead. Other specific examples could include, but aren't limited to, fruit or seeds, a type of bird or animal, fungi, or clouds.