



NATURE ART EXPLORATION

Summary

Students explore the beauty of the wetlands through an open-air water color activity. This is followed by the creation of sculptured clay models of native wetland animals.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn to observe nature with the eyes of an artist.
- Know that by paying attention to detail they can create realistic-looking clay models.
- Understand the importance of field guides and how to use them.

California Content Standards Addressed

Outline

There are 4 parts to this lesson:

- 1) Introduction to Art and Beauty in Nature (10 minutes)
- 2) Landscape or Object Watercolor Exploration (35 minutes)
- 3) Modeling Native Animals in Clay (35 minutes)
- 4) Closing Circle (5 minutes)

Materials

2) Landscape or Object Watercolor Exploration

1 clipboard for each student
2 sheets of watercolor paper or another thick paper for each student
1 paint brush for each student
10 to 20 watercolor paint palettes
10 to 15 plastic cups for water
6 to 8 water bottles full of water
pencils (optional)

3) Modeling Native Animals in Clay

Lots (the more the merrier) of Fimo Clay (or Sculpey) in all of the colors sold
Lots of bird, mammal, reptile/amphibian, and insect field guides (emphasis on California or west coast preferred)

The Basics:

Grade Level

4-8

Subject Area

Life Sciences, Art

Duration

95 minutes

Number of Docents Needed

1-2

Vocabulary

Model, Landscape

Background Material

When scientists, policy-makers, politicians, and the general public discuss the pros and cons to conserving wetlands and other natural spaces, often the focus of the discussion is on endangered species, or functions that the wetlands provides, or the feasibility of developing on the land. Often aesthetics and beauty do not play a role in this discussion, but why is that? Nature provides many beautiful, pleasurable, and calming experiences for humans that are even more necessary to human life in this increasingly technology-dependent society. In this lesson we explore our feelings towards beautiful experiences we have had in nature, why they are important, and to celebrate the beauty of nature through art.

Procedure

1) Introduction to Art and Beauty in Nature (10 minutes)

- Ask students to raise their hands if they have ever seen something beautiful in nature. Some kids will raise their hand and others will not. Explain that natural beauty is all around us and we do not have to travel into the wilderness to find it. A flock of birds in a tree downtown might be beautiful to you or maybe the flowers in their schoolyard or even a sunset over the town.
- Tell the students that you are going to go around the room and call on each person to share an experience that they have had in nature that was beautiful. Start with yourself and share one of your quieter moments. Try to stay away from the dramatic scenes, like the time you saw an avalanche or a mountain lion, because it might intimidate the kids who feel they have not “been in nature”.
- Once everyone in the room has shared an experience, explain that today we will try to capture the beauty of nature and encourage the students to do art on their own time as well so that they might remember their beautiful moments when they happen.
- * Note * If you have a very large class, it will save time if you break the class up into small groups before sharing beautiful experiences. Make sure a few stewards or docents are with each group of students. Then have them share experiences in their small groups.

2) Landscape or Object Watercolor Exploration (35 minutes)

- Explain to the students that their first art activity will be water-coloring out on the ESHA. Show the students several examples of watercolor art. This could be your own artwork, work on the internet, or example from art or nature journaling books. Reassure the students that their art does not have to be perfect and this is just practice for themselves but encourage them to try. Explain that they can paint anything that interests them. Their drawing could be the entire landscape, a plant, or a small bug; it is entirely up to them. Also encourage them to take notes about what they see on the side of their painting.

- Break the students, stewards, and docents into small groups if they are not already. Each person gets a clipboard, a few sheets of art paper, and a paint brush. The small group gets several palettes of watercolors, a few cups, and a water bottle full of water for the cups. The groups go out for a half hour or a little less as free watercolor exploration time in their groups.
- After a half hour, the students come back, put their painting at the back of the classroom to dry, wash out their cups and paintbrushes, and put the clipboards and palettes to the side.

3) Modeling Native Animals in Clay (35 minutes)

- Ask the kids if anyone has worked with clay before. Explain that today we are working with Fimo clay (or Sculpey) and that these clays need to be “warmed up” by mushing the clay with our hands before molding with them. Show them the bags of different color clays.
- Explain that each of them is going to make small, clay models of a native animal. Before grabbing some clay, each student should look through a mammal, bird, reptile/amphibian, or insect field guide and pick out one animal from California that they want to model. Then they can take their field guide and small amounts of clay in the colors that they need for their animal and start to work on molding. Show the students a model of an animal from one of the past groups as a demonstration. Note the small size. Each model animal should only be about two or three inches tall or long.
- Let them free explore with the clay for a half hour. Help them if they need to add more characteristics to their model to make it recognizable or if they are make their model too big.
- Once a half hour is up, have them put their models at the back near their paintings and sort the leftover clay by color and put it into zip-lock bags.

4) Closing Circle (5 minutes)

- Have students and stewards form a circle. Everyone passes a rock around and shares their favorite part of the day when it is their turn. Thank the students for coming.