

PAINTING WITH NATURE

GRADE: K-5

TIME: Two 45-minute sessions

Students find inspiration in the world outdoors by creating their own paintbrushes from found natural materials. Students then use their natural paintbrush collection to create a work of art inspired by nature, discovering the wide variety of textures and patterns that can be produced with natural materials found on the school's property or near their homes.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Visual Arts, Science, Social-Emotional Learning

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Found natural materials such as sticks,
leaves, pine needles, flowers, and
feathers

String, twine, or rubber bands

Paint

Canvas, sketchbooks, or paper

1. Understand Frank Lloyd Wright's admiration for nature and the ways in which he designed buildings in harmony with their natural environment.
2. Identify the natural surroundings of a school building.
3. Select objects from nature to create and utilize unique paintbrushes.
4. Create a work of art inspired by nature.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How did Frank Lloyd Wright use nature to inform his architectural designs?
2. How does a building relate to its environment?
3. What natural materials produce the most effective paintbrushes?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

Session One

- **Introduce students to Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture.** Tell students about his passion for designing buildings that are in harmony with their natural surroundings. Display a few examples of his architectural designs that illustrate his passion for creating buildings that harmonize with nature, such as the Frederick C. Robie House, Taliesin, Taliesin West, and Fallingwater.
 - Differentiation for younger students: Emphasize natural materials and colors.
 - Differentiation for older students: Introduce the concept of organic design and Wright’s creation of the Prairie style.

ENGAGE

Session One

- **Invite students to better connect to nature by going on a nature walk.** While on the walk, challenge students to observe the natural surroundings of their school and take note of how the school building connects—or doesn’t connect—with its natural environment.
 - Optional: This walk can take place on the school grounds! Even if you’re walking on sidewalks or in a parking lot, see what natural features you can observe, maybe from a distance, above you, or even between cracks in the sidewalk.
- **After walking for a few minutes, ask students to look even more closely at the natural objects in their surroundings. Have students consider:** Is there anything I can collect from my school site to turn into paintbrushes? (Tip: We recommend sticks, leaves, pine needles, flowers, grass and feathers, but encourage students to gather anything that could be fashioned into a paintbrush.)
 - Optional: For homework, ask students to find additional natural materials.

DESIGN

Session Two

- **Ask students to use string, twine, or rubber bands to assemble their paintbrushes.**
 - Differentiation: Assemble the brushes for younger and less dexterous learners.
- **First, have students experiment to see what sort of brush strokes they can create with the different materials. Have students consider:** Is there a particular brush that I prefer? Do any brushes create an interesting texture that reminds me of my school’s natural surroundings?
 - Encourage students to use natural colors to connect their painting with nature.
 - Differentiation: Use natural dyes instead of paint.
- **Next, ask students to carefully select paintbrushes that will allow them to create a more complete picture. Give them the freedom to choose whether they want to create an abstract piece or something that directly references something in nature.**
 - If time and logistics allow for it, do this painting activity outdoors to give students more opportunities to connect their art with the natural surroundings.

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Two

- **Allow time for students to share their work, either as a whole class or in small groups. Have them consider:** Which paintbrushes did I find to be most successful and why? How did this activity challenge my creativity? What would I do differently if given another opportunity to do this project?