

Nature's Palette: Botanical Art Adventures

1 hour · Pre-K – 8th · After School · Teacher: Erika Wayoro

Instructions: This lesson plan is your starting point — feel free to edit, rearrange, or customize it to fit your teaching style and your students' needs! These notes are yours. They will not be published anywhere.

Topics Covered

Botanical illustration · Sensory observation · Natural art materials · Scientific drawing · Plant anatomy · Color mixing

Lesson Plan

1. Welcome & Sensory Circle (10 min)

- Gather students in a circle with fresh lavender sprigs for each child to hold
- Guide a 5-senses exploration: What do you see (color, shape)? Smell? Feel (texture)? Hear (crushing stems)? Note: no tasting without parent permission
- Pass around a bottle of lavender essential oil on cotton balls for scent comparison
- Ask students to share one word that describes lavender and write responses on poster board

2. Historical Art Gallery Walk (8 min)

- Display printed slides of 1800s botanical illustrations by artists like Maria Sibylla Merian and Pierre-Joseph Redouté
- Point out key features: how artists showed plant details, color choices, labels, scientific accuracy
- Play 'I Spy' game: find specific details like 'a flower bud' or 'a leaf vein' in the illustrations
- Explain that botanical artists were scientists AND artists who helped people learn about plants

3. Observation Sketching (20 min)

- Distribute magnifying glasses and have students examine real lavender closely for 2 minutes
- Demonstrate how to draw what you see, not what you think it looks like: start with stem shape, add leaves, then flower spike
- Students create pencil sketches on drawing paper with lavender specimen beside them
- Encourage drawing details: How many petals? What shape are leaves? Are stems straight or curved?
- Circulate to give positive, specific feedback: 'I see you noticed the tiny hairs on the stem!'

4. Color Mixing & Painting (18 min)

- Show how to mix purple: 'We need blue and red, but which shades make lavender purple?'
- Students experiment on scrap paper mixing different blue/red/white combinations to match their lavender
- Once they find their color, paint over pencil sketches using watercolors or tempera paint
- Add green stems and leaves using similar color-matching technique

5. Reflection & Gallery Setup (4 min)

- Students write botanical labels for their artwork: plant name, date, and their name as 'Artist-Scientist'
- Share with a partner: What was the hardest part to draw? What surprised you about lavender?
- Place artwork on drying rack or display wall for next week's gallery

Materials Checklist

- ☐ Fresh lavender sprigs (2–3 per student)
- ☐ Lavender essential oil and cotton balls
- ☐ Magnifying glasses (1 per 2–3 students)
- ☐ Drawing paper and pencils with erasers
- ☐ Watercolors or tempera paints with brushes
- ☐ Printed botanical illustration examples (8–10 images)
- ☐ Water cups and paper towels
- ☐ Markers for labeling

Age Adaptations

Younger Kids: Pre-K to 2nd grade: Skip detailed pencil sketching; instead trace leaf shapes and stamp with lavender bundles dipped in paint. Use larger paper and thicker brushes. Focus sensory time on touch and smell with guided questions. Keep historical images to 3–4 simple, colorful examples.

Older Kids: 5th to 8th grade: Add scientific terminology (stamen, pistil, inflorescence). Challenge students to

create cross-section views or life-cycle illustrations. Research and present on one historical botanical artist. Use ink pens for final details and create artist statements explaining their techniques.

Movement Break

Lavender Field Dance: Students become lavender plants swaying in the wind (gentle side-to-side movements), growing tall toward the sun (stretching up), then bees buzzing from flower to flower (buzzing sounds while moving around the room), ending by 'wilting' down slowly to rest before returning to seats.

Bonus Activities

- Create lavender sachets using dried lavender and fabric squares tied with ribbon
- Press fresh lavender in heavy books to preserve for future art projects
- Draw the same lavender sprig from three different angles (top, side, close-up)
- Research where lavender grows naturally and mark locations on a world map

Series Outline (13 Weeks)

Week	Theme	Key Activities
1	Lavender: Purple Introduction to Botanical Art	Five senses lavender exploration and essential oil comparison, View 1800s botanical illustration examples and identify key features, Create detailed pencil and watercolor lavender botanical illustration
2	Roses: Layered Petals & Color Gradients	Observe rose anatomy with focus on petal arrangement and thorns, Learn gradient painting technique for soft petal transitions, Create rose illustration showing inside and outside views
3	Sunflowers: Geometry in Nature	Discover Fibonacci spirals in sunflower seed heads using real specimens, Practice drawing circular patterns and overlapping petals, Create life-size or scaled sunflower illustration with seed detail
4	Oak Leaves & Acorns: Autumn Collection	Collect and classify different oak leaf shapes (if possible, or use samples), Learn leaf rubbing technique and vein observation, Draw oak branch with leaves and acorns showing growth stages
5	Ferns: Ancient Plant Patterns	Examine fern fronds and identify repeating patterns (fractals), Create fern spore prints on paper, Draw detailed fern illustration emphasizing

Week	Theme	Key Activities
		symmetry and repetition
6	Mushrooms & Fungi: Hidden Kingdom	Study mushroom structures (cap, gills, stem) using specimens or models, Learn about fungi's role in nature through story and discussion, Illustrate mushroom from side view with habitat details
7	Pinecones & Evergreens: Winter Wonders	Dissect pinecones to find seeds and observe scale patterns, Compare different evergreen needles (pine, spruce, fir), Create evergreen branch illustration with pinecone and needle detail
8	Berries & Fruits: Nature's Jewels	Observe berry clusters (holly, winterberry, or safe varieties) and fruit cross-sections, Practice painting translucent effects for juicy berries, Illustrate berry branch showing leaves, berries, and stems
9	Wildflower Bouquet: Composition Skills	Arrange multiple wildflower types (dandelions, clover, daisies) into composition, Learn about focal points and balance in botanical arrangements, Create multi-plant illustration with overlapping elements
10	Tree Bark & Texture Studies	Collect bark rubbings from different tree species (or use samples), Practice drawing various textures: rough, smooth, peeling, ridged, Create texture study page with labeled bark samples and drawings
11	Seeds & Pods: Travel Designs	Examine seed dispersal methods using maple helicopters, dandelion puffs, burrs, Test how different seeds move (blow, spin, stick), Illustrate seed collection showing dispersal adaptations
12	Flowering Bulbs: Spring Preview	Cut open tulip or daffodil bulb to see layers and interior structure, Learn bulb life cycle from underground to bloom, Create cutaway illustration showing both above and below ground
13	Portfolio Day: Young Botanist Exhibition	Students select their best 3–5 pieces for portfolio display, Create exhibition labels with plant facts and artistic reflections, Host mini-gallery walk where students present one favorite piece to the group



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