

PROJECT INSPIRE LESSON PLAN

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE GARDEN

Curriculum Objectives

This engaging activity offers a chance to observe plants and gardens closely in pairs followed by descriptive and creative writing. During the course of our lives, we are constantly bombarded with visual information. In fact, so much visual news comes to us that we learn to tune out and “not see” details that would overwhelm us if we were to be continually observing. With this activity, we aim to look closely in an effort to sharpen observation skills – skills that are essential to many disciplines such as science, writing, and the arts.

Details

Location: Stono Preserve or other garden space

Lesson: Outdoors

Activity: Outdoors

Time of year: Anytime

Age: Elementary or Middle school

Materials

- Writing paper and a pencil for each participant
- Flowers or other garden plants

Activity

Students will work in teams, with one as the “photographer” and the other as the “camera”. After talking about the activity, and what they noticed, they will write short poems, such as haiku, based on what they have observed about the plants they have seen.

1. Choose a location in the garden (or an indoor space where students can explore flowers and other plants up close) and discuss as a class initial observations, including what we tune out or don't see. Ask the group what the difference is between looking and careful observation.
 - a. You might begin with an example, such as the way people in the Northeast eagerly await the return of robins. Those first few robins you see are exciting and are often pointed out – “It's a robin, it must really be spring!” Within a week or two, robins are everywhere, become a part of the outdoor background, and many people stop noticing them.

- b. Another example is how we tune out familiar information that we simply do not need. You may ask the group to describe the details of a very familiar setting, such as the school hallway, places in their homes, the after school program, or the community center they walk through daily. Although they may recall the bigger parts of the scene, they may likely have forgotten details. Subtle patterns on the wall, accumulated dirt or papers in corners, what is written on a chalkboard, and other elements may disappear from our conscious minds.
2. Generate a discussion. What are other examples of ways in which we have a great deal of visual information around us that we miss? Why do we tune it out? In which occupations would keen observation be a critical part of the work?
3. Have students pair up. Ask for two volunteers to demonstrate how one student will be the “photographer” while the other is the “camera.” The camera will have his/her eyes closed, while the photographer positions him/her close to a beautiful flowering bulb, for example, at an angle that will offer a unique and perhaps unexpected perspective. Positioning could be from above, from below, up close, or far away. When cued the camera will open his/her eyes for 10 seconds, record a visual memory of what s/he has observed, then close their eyes again. Move the camera to a new location; repeat two more times. Have the camera jot down his/her observations then switch roles.
 - a. Alternatively, students could be tasked with drawing their observations and identifying observations that might have typically gone unnoticed.
4. Gather together to discuss the process. What did students notice when they were the camera that they might not have otherwise? Often, young people will describe intricate details of texture, color variation, delicate drops of dew, flower structures, insect visitors, and other details they may have never seen before.
5. From this discussion, generate a list of types of things a good artist or scientist observes: lines, shapes, forms, shadows, shades, tones, perspectives and size in relation to each other.
6. After discussing, students are ready to use their observation to write poetry about the plants they observed. The 5-7-5 syllable structure of a haiku is a good place to begin.
 - a. You might encourage students to take the same subject and play around with different version of it. Which of their poems do they prefer and why?

Additional Resources

- Activity taken from [Dig Art! Cultivating Creativity in the Garden; additional examples and ideas for taking this activity further provided here \(PDF\)](#)
- [Rules for Writing Haiku \(website\)](#)

Source: [Viewbug](#)



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