

Botanical Watercolor *Learning to Draw and paint plants*

Lesson Designer: Laura Bocquin

Grade Level: 3 (adaptable to other grades)

Enduring Understanding: Visual imagery influences our understanding of and responses to our natural environment.

Essential Question:

How can looking closely and drawing what we see help us create scientifically accurate and creative representations of Alabama plant life?

Arts Discipline Standards: Visual Arts

Alabama Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media, and artmaking approaches.

Grade 3: Creating

- 3.2: Demonstrate skills using available resources, tools, and technologies.
- 3.4: Demonstrate an understanding of the safe and proficient use of materials, tools, equipment, and studio space.
- 3.6: Refine artwork in progress by adding details to enhance emerging meaning.

Non-Arts Discipline Standards: Science

Grade 3.6: Create representations to explain the unique and diverse life cycles of organisms other than humans (flowering plants).

Requirements: Materials and Supplies:

- Images of Alabama plants
- Watercolor paper (4"x6")
- Blue tape
- Pencil and eraser
- Color wheel
- Small watercolor paintbrush
- Watercolor paint
- Cup of water
- Paper towels
- Technical pen (optional)



Requirements: Prerequisite Knowledge – Arts:

How to use a color wheel as an artistic tool, especially for mixing colors.

Arts Vocabulary Addressed: line, shape, color, implied depth, wet on dry technique, wet on wet technique, value

Requirements: Prerequisite Knowledge – Non-Arts:

Knowledge of scientific names for and functions of parts of a flowering plant.

Non-Arts Vocabulary Addressed: flora, petal, stamen, anther, filament, sepal, leaf, stem

Procedures: Introductory Activity:

Choose a plant to use as the inspiration for your work of art. Observe the plant closely and point out various parts by their scientific identities.

Procedures: Sequence of Activities:

1. Prepare your watercolor paper by pressing the blue tape firmly along each side of the paper, overlapping at the corners, with some tape on the paper and part of the tape adhering it to the surface of the table/board/whatever surface you are working on.
2. Choose your starting point for drawing the plant. If the plant has a flower, begin here, as this will be the focal point of the artwork. Look closely at the petals, consider each overall shape, and what types of lines may be used to replicate that shape.
3. Draw one petal at a time, keeping in mind the perspective from which you are viewing the plant. If you are looking at the petal so that you see its full shape, draw it that way. If you are seeing it at an angle or from the side, so the shape is altered, draw what you see--don't let your brain try to trick you into drawing what you "know" is there if that's not your current perspective.
4. After drawing the petals, look closely at the center of the flower. If it has stamen, draw these by breaking down the filaments and anthers into simple lines and shapes. The filaments can be drawn as lines--just pay attention to how long or short they are, or if they are varying lengths or uniform. The anthers are likely circular or ovular; just look closely to get size and shape correct!
5. Repeat the same process for drawing the stem (if you see it from your viewpoint!) and any leaves on the plant that you see. Stems are simple: two lines, likely straight, but be aware of any curve. Leaves are also made from drawing lines: curved, scalloped, diagonal--it just depends on the type of plant.
6. Before painting, review the color wheel (specifically: primary, secondary, and complementary colors). Identify the colors on the plant you're going to paint, and plan how you can use the colors to deepen or lighten the value of colors needed to create implied depth. For example, if the petals are purple and part of a petal is in shadow/underneath another and "farther away" from the viewpoint, add more blue to the premixed purple in order to achieve a deeper value. You can also use complementary colors to create a muddier and darker hue, like adding red to green to make darker green for depth and shadows.



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7. Begin by putting a small amount of water into each color of the watercolor palette (rinsing brush well between each color) in order to get the full palette ready for painting. Dip the paintbrush into the water cup, touch that brush full of water to a color in the palette, rinse, and repeat with the next color until the whole palette is dampened.
8. Now it's time to paint! When painting the different parts of the plant drawing, use a wet on dry technique, meaning using wet paint (adding water to the paints to make them liquid) on dry paper. This technique allows you to have strong control over where the paint goes and what shapes you create. Suggested order of painting: petals, stem, anything else green, then add color to details if applicable (sepals, filaments, anthers, any shadows).
9. After the focal point has been painted, have fun painting the background. Use a wet on wet technique (wet paint on wet paper) to achieve a loose, abstracted look that will complete the picture but keep focus on the main plant. Do this by painting clean water onto the background (around/behind the focal plant), then getting desired colors on your brush and touching those colors "into" the already wet paper. Have fun and enjoy!
10. Finally, after the painting is dry, peel back your blue tape (starting with the last strip pressed down), to reveal a crisp border edge!
An optional ending: After the painting is dry, use a very fine point technical pen to enhance shapes and details by outlining some of the original shapes. This is a great way to bring structural lines back into the work of art.

Culminating Activity: Performance Task:

Students practiced close observation skills, used pencils to create an accurate botanical drawing, then enhanced those drawings with watercolor paints to create a painting with implied depth and scientific accuracy.

Culminating Activity: Evaluation:

- Students studied flowering plants.
- Students identified parts of flowering plants.
- Students practiced close observation by drawing what they saw from a certain perspective.
- Students mixed colors to create value accuracy in order to achieve implied depth.

