

3.7.2 Nature-Inspired Art

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

Students, accompanied by the teacher, go outside near the school (to a park, courtyard, or forest edge) to collect natural materials such as leaves, stones, branches, and seeds. Upon returning to school (or staying outdoors), they create pictures, small sculptures, land art installations, or other compositions from these materials. They then present their works to each other and discuss their experiences and impressions from the creative process. The activity helps students connect with nature through experiential learning and create original artistic expressions. The students engage in open-ended investigation, observing shapes, textures, colours, and patterns that spark new questions and ideas.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Connectedness
 - Creativity

Age group	Student number	Duration
8 years old	whole class working in small groups	90 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

The activity consists of three interrelated phases. Each phase plays a crucial role in helping students connect with nature through experiential learning and create original artistic expressions.

1. **Preparation – Getting in the Mood and Setting Rules** (15 min): The teacher initiates a conversation with the students: What counts as a natural material? What can we find in nature? (leaves, branches, stones, seeds, etc.). The students brainstorm together what they could make from these items. They discuss ethical collection rules, e.g.: Do not pick living plants; Only collect what has already fallen; Avoid disturbing living creatures (insects, snails); Don't collect sharp or dangerous objects (e.g., broken glass). Each student receives a small bag or folder for collecting. The teacher shows some inspirational images (projected or printed) to spark creativity.
2. **Material Collection – Nature Walk and Gathering** (30 min): Students go out with the teacher and, if possible, another adult, to the schoolyard, nearby park, or forest edge. Their task: collect interesting, beautiful, or uniquely shaped natural materials — ideally a variety (leaves, seeds, branches, stones, flower petals, moss, pinecones, etc.). The teacher walks among them and asks questions like, “What did you find? What could you make from it?” to encourage creative thinking. Important: the activity should not feel rushed, but like a joyful discovery through observation and wonder.
3. **Creation – Making Compositions from Natural Materials** (40 min): The class returns to the classroom or stays outside at a suitable spot (e.g., benches, blankets).

4. **Students work individually or in small groups of 2–4.** Creative options: Postcard or mandala made from leaves and petals glued onto cardboard; Sculpture or installation built from branches, stones, and seeds; Storytelling picture: a nature scene (e.g., forest, lakeside, animals); The teacher provides materials for assembly (glue, string, scissors), and supports students as needed. Students can freely experiment or ask for thematic suggestions.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Flexible classroom seating is ideal to support pair or group work.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

The “Nature-Inspired Art” learning activity primarily nurtures students’ curiosity by inviting them to explore the natural environment with a sense of wonder and discovery. As they search for leaves, stones, and other natural materials, students engage in open-ended investigation observing shapes, textures, colours, and patterns that spark new questions and ideas. This exploratory phase encourages them to look more closely at nature, deepening their interest in the world around them and strengthening their observational awareness. During the creative process, students experiment with unfamiliar materials, try out spontaneous combinations, and follow their own imaginative impulses. This freedom promotes creative risk-taking and flexible, curiosity-driven problem-solving. Collaborative collecting, group creation, and peer sharing further expand their curiosity as they encounter different perspectives and unexpected interpretations from classmates. Overall, the experiential and tactile nature of this activity cultivates a deep emotional connection to nature, inspires continuous inquiry, and fosters respect and appreciation for the natural world grounding creativity in a mindset of curiosity and openness.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will be able to explore natural environments with curiosity, observe small details with a sense of wonder, and use natural materials to express their ideas creatively.

- They will understand how curiosity supports discovery and how careful observation helps them notice textures, colours, shapes, and patterns in nature.
- They will be able to transform natural materials into artistic creations, ask exploratory questions, and articulate what caught their interest during the process. Through hands-on experience, they will connect emotionally with nature and appreciate it as a source of inspiration.

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

This activity can be integrated into a wide variety of school events and programs throughout the year. It not only enhances creativity but also connects to environmental studies, education for sustainability, and visual expression.

Examples:

- Mandala from autumn leaves. Method: Students collect leaves of different colours and shapes and arrange them in circular, symmetrical designs on cardboard. Development focus: Hand-eye coordination, shape recognition, composition, patience.

Differentiation: Younger children make simple designs, older students try complex symmetries.
Extension: Create a classroom exhibit, add seasonal quotes.

- **Pebble shapes or animal figures.** Method: Students use different-sized and coloured pebbles to form animals, landscapes, or abstract patterns. Technique: Arrange figures on a flat surface, optionally fix them (glue, tray). Development: Fine motor skills, spatial thinking, symbolic representation. Idea: Invent stories for the figures, integrating language arts.
- **Mini sculptures or totem poles from branches and seeds.** Method: Combine sticks, acorns, cones, nutshells, and willow twigs creatively with glue or string. Theme: Free or directed (e.g., “Guardian of the Forest,” “Fairy Creature”). Purpose: Spatial thinking, storytelling, using natural forms for artistic goals. Variation: Group totem pole with each child contributing a “level” to create a joint piece.
- **Why use it?** Nature-inspired art is an interdisciplinary activity combining natural sciences, visual arts, creative writing, and environmental awareness. It is child-friendly, motivating, and provides a tangible experience. It’s easily adaptable to each child’s pace and ideas, and cost-effective — nature provides the materials.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- Natural materials: leaves, branches, stones, seeds, etc.
- Cardboard, boxes, wooden bases
- Glue, tape
- Scissors, string
- Wet wipes (for hand cleaning)
- Collection bags/folders

Guiding questions

In pairs/small groups:

- What made you curious about this material?
- What was the first thing you noticed when you picked it up?
- What questions came to mind as you looked at it more closely?
- How did working together help you discover something new?
- What surprising detail did you find during creation?

With the whole class:

- What new things did we discover about nature while collecting materials?
- How did curiosity influence the choices you made in your artwork?
- How did it feel to create something using objects found outdoors?
- In what ways is this artwork different from what you would normally draw on paper, and why might that spark new ideas?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Unpredictable weather
Tip: Prepare a pre-collected indoor kit of natural materials. Provide themed trays (shapes, colours) so students can still explore materials with curiosity, even indoors.
- **Challenge:** Safety and responsible behaviour outdoors
Tip: Give a clear rule briefing (no picking living plants, respect animals). Assign a “safety or material supervisor” in each group to monitor responsible collecting.
- **Challenge:** Some students collect too few or too similar materials
Tip: Encourage them to look for textures, patterns, and unusual shapes. Have them pick at least one item that sparks a question (“What tree might this come from?”).
- **Challenge:** Material shortage or uneven distribution
Tip: Create a shared “raw material basket” for all groups. Provide extra natural objects collected in advance.
- **Challenge:** Students struggle to transform materials into ideas
Tip: Show sample images (mandalas, pebble animals, leaf creatures). Use prompt questions: “What could this leaf become? A wing? A boat? A mountain?”

Difficulty level tailoring

Teachers can adapt the activity to three levels depending on students’ curiosity, confidence, and experience:

- **Beginners (6-7 years old):** Students create a simple composition using one type of natural material (e.g., leaf collage). They explore the material with guided questions that encourage curiosity such as noticing shape, texture, or colour. Material collection is supported by the teacher, and the theme is structured to help students begin observing nature with interest.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** Students combine several types of natural materials and create a small scene. Curiosity is fostered through group exploration, where students compare findings and discuss unexpected discoveries. A brief oral reflection allows them to share what surprised them and what new details they noticed.
- **Experts (9–10 years old):** Students design a more complex creation that expresses a personal idea, symbolic meaning, or abstract concept (e.g., representing a season or mood). They independently plan their work, guided by curiosity-driven inquiry—asking deeper questions about materials, their qualities, and how they can communicate meaning. Exploration and self-directed investigation are central at this level.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

These reflection questions help students recognise, label, and discuss how their curiosity, sense of wonder, and observational awareness developed during the activity.

Individual or pair sharing:

- What made you curious during the nature walk? What did you notice first?
- Which material sparked the most questions in your mind? Why?
- How did your curiosity influence the artwork you created?
- What new detail did you observe today that you had never noticed in nature before?
- When you faced a difficulty, how did curiosity help you find a solution?

Whole-class discussion (teacher-led):

- What helped you stay open and curious while working with natural materials?
- How did observing small details (colour, texture, shape) support your creativity? How did your classmates' ideas inspire new questions or discoveries for you?
- Why is curiosity important when exploring nature or creating art?
- How can this sense of wonder help you in other subjects (science, art, storytelling)?

