

“The Sunflower Project”

Nebraska Roots: Botany, Art and Culture



Arts Curriculum for Grades K-12 From the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum has been promoting school gardens, “Nebraska-style” landscaping and plant science literacy for nearly three decades.

A comment made by a teacher in western Nebraska continues to challenge us... “They don’t even know the plants out their own backdoor.” With that in mind, we turn to a plant common throughout the state to help connect students to the beauty and wonder of plants. It is a weed to some, to others a symbol of what we are—adaptable, hardy, varied and either beautiful or common, depending on your perspective.

In this curriculum, you will find opportunities to draw your students’ attention to one of the plants out their own backdoor—to look at it, see it from different perspectives, learn about and attempt a wide variety of artistic techniques... and hopefully both lose themselves and find themselves in the process.



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“Wherever humans have gone, sunflowers have followed. The sunflower is the consummate American plant: tenacious, brash, bright, open, varied, optimistic, and cheerful, it might well be considered the true American flower. The impressive physiological characteristics of the sunflower and its very long association with mankind are worthy of a lifetime of study... From its complex natural history, its persistence, its great appeal as a symbol of the sun, and its usefulness, we gain insight not only about this plant but the plant kingdom as a whole.”

Lady Bird Johnson, *Wildflowers Across America*

“The Sunflower Project” Interdisciplinary Curriculum for High Schools
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Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

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Arts Are Basic

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ARTISTS

Curriculum Artists: Susan Brasch and Roberta Sward

Susan Brasch has created artwork consistently since childhood and has art in several corporate collections, art museums, art galleries and private collections. After receiving her BFA from UN-L in 1972 and working in academia and corporate/marketing structures, Brasch chose to become a full-time artist in 1982. Primarily a painter, Brasch has created many artworks using oil patel on tar paper and acrylic on canvas and board. Presently her work is using aerial photographs as references for paintings and drawings. Her studio has been #9 in the Burkholder Project for the last 15 years. Brasch is an Artist-in-Residence in the Schools and Communities through the NE Arts Council, one of the founders of the Lincoln Children’s Museum, and a certified mediator. Brasch is also a professional workshop facilitator in conducting “trusting Your Process” workshops using symbols and learning styles as keys to self-development, creativity, self-expression and communication. Brasch was named Woman Artist of the Year 2000 for visual arts from the Commission on the Status of Women.

Roberta Sward, an artist whose studio is in Lincoln, Nebraska's Burkholder Project, won the 2003 and 2002 botanical print competition with her illustrations of common milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca* and wild rose, *Rosa woodsii*. Sward teaches oil and acrylic painting and drawing and has won several awards, including Lincoln Artists' Guild Juried Shows and Phi Theta Kappa Seven State Competition. She has a painting in Wesleyan University's Permanent Collection and her work can be seen in the Burkholder Galleries. Sward is past President of the Lincoln Artists' Guild and has served on the Boards of the Lincoln Arts Council and the Association of Nebraska Art Clubs, Inc.

Contributing Artists: Gretchen Peters, Karina Helm, Lacey DiPaolo, Carol Rustad,
Kristin Pluhacek, David Rigenbach and Delores Ruzicka

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“The Sunflower Project” Arts Curriculum

The curriculum presented in this packet offers a choice of 22 art projects, plus variations for many of them. The first project is the most important exercise. **If only one project is to be chosen, the first project will be the most beneficial.** After completing the first project, depending on the focus in the classroom, the teacher can select additional classroom projects based on interest, time and materials available. Another option is to allow individuals in the classroom to select the project/s they want to pursue.

The projects are presented in a step-by-step fashion and are presented only as guidelines. Art is a field that encourages imagination, exploration and experimentation. It is our hope that while learning about the sunflower you will enjoy the artistic process and the opportunity to bring your own vision to the projects.

In other words, the primary objective behind all of these projects is to become more observant and to enjoy the creative process!

Susan Brasch

Art Projects included in this Curriculum Packet

- 1. Observing the Subject**
- 2. Newspaper Design**
- 3. Fresco**
- 4. Impasto**
- 5. Scrimshaw Etchings**
- 6. Roofing Felt (tar paper) Drawings**
- 7. Viewfinder Close-ups**
- 8. Playing with Different Perspectives**
- 9. Logo**
- 10. Thumbnail Drawings and Paintings**
- 11. Collage and Magazine Pictures**
- 12. Solar Prints**
- 13. String Pictures**
- 14. Tissue Paper Overlay**
- 15. Rubbings**
- 16. Mono Prints**
- 17. Seed Designs**
- 18. Seed Jewelry**
- 19. Stamping**
- 20. Paper Stencils**
- 21. Paper Piercing**
- 22. Scratch board**
- 23. Sunflower to color!**

Graphics Appendix A. Primary Sunflowers of Nebraska

Graphics Appendix B. Sunflower Details

Graphics Appendix C. Botany of Sunflowers

Graphics Appendix D. Artistic Interpretations of Sunflowers

* Teachers can select 2-3 jpegs of student artwork for website: schoolgardens.unl.edu
Send jpegs to klarsen1@unl.edu

1: Observing the Subject

Note: This beginning project is the most important of all the ones included in this art curriculum.

Materials: A real sunflower with stem and leaves (or artificial one from craft store if not available)
Some good photos of sunflowers (see Graphics Appendixes A-D)
A garden catalog with sunflower examples (optional)
Google “sunflowers” in “images” category (optional)
Paper
Pencils (colored or regular #2)
Fine tip roller-ball pen
Acrylic paint
Paper, canvas or masonite
Colored construction paper
Scissors and glue

Process:

Carefully observe a sunflower, whether it is real and in front of you or in a picture. Observing firsthand is the best way to get to know your subject. It imprints your brain and alerts your hand-eye coordination, which will be used to draw the sunflower.

Take a close look at all the different shapes, textures and colors. On a piece of paper using a pencil, draw a simple outline of at least three different aspects of the sunflower. You might draw a petal, or several petals. Perhaps the stem and leaf interest you, or maybe the circular center full of seeds.

By drawing the different parts of the sunflower it gives you an up-close-and-personal observation of what makes up the whole of the plant. Now, verbally and /or in written form, describe what you have seen and drawn.

This description can be scientific or lyrical. For example: “The leaf measures five inches in length, has a central stem that radiates to the outer leaf, etc.” or “The seed is pointed on one end and rounded on the other when singular, but march together in a circular crowd without much individuality.”

Take the three aspects of color, texture and shape and create a realistic picture using your choice of materials. It could be a realistic interpretation, up-close or so close it becomes almost abstract. Or you could create a scientific illustration of the plant, a drawing that includes enlarged or reduced details of separate elements of the plant (seed, leaf, branch).

Variations:

Once you have spent some time carefully observing your subject, you can branch out in many areas and explore the sunflower through many other creative options.

- Make cartoon-like flowers in a garden with facial expressions
- Draw a science fiction-like version of a sunflower in which the flower is actually a building or a planet where sunflowers rule.
- Cut out the shapes that you observed and drew on your first observation project, using construction paper in a range of sunflower or other colors. Cut out varying sizes and in multiples. Use the multiple shapes and sizes to create an interesting abstract composition that may or may not resemble the sunflower.

2: Newspaper Design

Materials:

Paper
newspaper
acrylic or tempera paint
paint brushes
scissors
oil pastels
turpentine
glue

Process:

1. Paint a background on the paper, like a garden, a field or an abstract design.
2. Set aside the background to dry.
3. Draw a stem, several leaves, petals and seeds on the newspaper (whole flower or in separate pieces) and cut out.
4. Glue the cut out newspaper pieces on to the painted background and use oil pastels (dipping brush into turpentine and brush over oil pastel lines to look like a wash of color) or use the water-based paints to add color and details.

3: Fresco

Fresco means to paint with water-based paint on wet plaster. Fresco means “fresh” in Italian, referring to the wet plaster which the paint permeates and becomes part of.

Materials:

Watercolor or tempera paints
Brush/water in container
Plaster of Paris
Pie tin of paper plate
Stick for stirring

Process:

1. Mix plaster of Paris according to the box directions, and pour into a paper plate. Flatten with a spoon or a stick and insert a hanging device, such as a paper clip, if it will be hung on a wall.
2. Paint one large sunflower or several sunflowers on the wet plaster in tempera or watercolor paints. The plaster will need to remain damp to continue painting.
3. Allow the plaster to dry.
4. Remove the plaster from the paper plate or tin.
5. Hang or use as a table or shelf decoration.

Variation:

With a real sunflower or an artificial one (silk or plastic from a craft store), press down into the wet plaster to get an imprint. Apply paint while wet, as in the fresco version, or let it dry and then paint.

4: Impasto

Impasto—“Painting in which the paint is laid thickly on the canvas.” (*Webster’s Dictionary*)

Materials:

Tempera paint

Liquid starch

Dark paper

Drawing objects (paper clips, comb, stick, plastic forks and knives)

Process:

1. Choose the colors most suited to paint a sunflower.
2. Mix tempera paint with liquid starch until thick and fluffy.
3. Brush a thick layer over dark paper.
4. Using your drawing objects, draw the design of a sunflower or other plants with the paint.
5. Paint over the surface and begin again if you wish.

Variation:

Dip a popsicle stick into the paint and starch mixture and spread it on the paper in globs. Allow to dry. Add more layers and more colors. Drying it between layers will make it resemble a true oil painting. This variation can be painted in a realistic manner or in abstract shapes relating to the sunflower.

5: Scrimshaw Etchings

Scrimshaw—“An intricate decoration or carving.” (*Webster’s Dictionary*)

Materials:

White plastic bottle

Nail or large needle

Felt pen or crayon

Rag

Yarn, optional

Process:

1. Cut the flat part of a plastic bottle into a shape
2. Scratch a sunflower design into the plastic with a needle. The sunflower can be stem and flower or just the flower and could be either a detailed or a logo-like (simplified) version.
3. Color the scratches with a pen or crayons.
4. Rub the plastic with the rag. Color will be left inside the scratches only.
5. Make a hole in the top of the scrimshaw-etched design, if desired.
6. Wear as necklace or use as a wall-hanging.

Variation:

- Make two holes in the design, insert ribbon and wear as a bracelet.
- Scrimshaw etching picture can be glued to cardboard or other frame.

6: Roofing felt (tar paper) Drawings

Materials:

Roofing felt (15 lb. tar paper) from local roofer, contractor, or lumberyard

Oil pastels (Sakura is one of the best school grade) or colored pencils (Prismacolor pencils work well)

Scissors

Process:

1. Cut a piece of roofing felt to a comfortable size.
2. Lay it on a flat surface and draw on the side that has no lines.
3. Draw a field of sunflowers or a singular flower, letting the black of the paper show through between shapes.
4. paper show through between shapes.

Variations:

- Paint a thin coat of gesso, plaster of Paris, latex, acrylic or white tempera paint on roofing felt as a primer for the surface. While still wet, draw a design on the surface with your finger or using an instrument. Another option is to let the applied coat of paint dry and then draw or paint on the surface.
- Using seeds, cardboard shapes, beans, feathers, tissue paper, etc., create your own sunflower version by adhering these materials onto the tar paper.

7: Viewfinder Close-ups

Materials:

Cardboard or stiff paper

Scissors or exacto knife

Media of your choice

Process:

1. Take the paper, fold in half, and cut a relatively small window out.
2. Through the cut window, view the plant up close and find shapes and shadows that might be interesting to paint.

Note: When you take a viewfinder to an object, it can help simplify and focus the composition to the point that it becomes abstract rather than realistic.

8: Playing with Different Perspectives

Materials:

Drawing and painting media
Paper, Bristol board or canvas

Process:

Visualize your object as being a large monumental version, one that is blown up beyond its normal size. You might, for instance, think of the sunflower as a design for a housing unit or a building several stories tall.

Draw it from the perspective of looking up at it.

Another option is to draw the perspective of the flower from an aerial view, a bird's eye view taken from above.

To further imagine the sunflower as a building structure, how would the stem, leaves, flower, seeds and petals be used if it were a structure that housed people?

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9: Logo

Materials:

Pencil
Pen and ink
Paper
Markers
Computer graphics

Process:

Design a logo for a company, either real or imagined, using a version of the sunflower.

What kind of company is it?

Why would that particular company take the sunflower as its symbolic representation?

What about the sunflower makes it an appropriate symbolic interpretation of that particular company?

Variations:

- Design a logo using just black and white.
- Design a version using color.

10: Thumbnail drawings and paintings. How many ways can you draw, paint or otherwise illustrate a sunflower?

Materials:

Drawing and painting supplies

Paper 12 x18

Construction paper

Glue

Scissors

Process:

1. Divide your paper into nine individual squares or rectangles.
2. Here are some ideas: smooth line gestural, sketchy, cross-hatch, black and white, color, logo-type version, up-close, far in the distance, a portion of, a field of multiples, totally abstract, mosaic, stained glass, painterly with loose brush strokes, highly stylized, photograph, etc.
3. After doing the nine different versions, look to see which of these thumbnails you could use to create something more permanent.

Variations:

- Take all nine versions or a portion of the thumbnails and collage them into an interesting composition.
- Take two thumbnails that you like and mount them on a piece of matte board or contrast color so that you have an attractive pair or diptych.
(illustration)
- Choose three thumbnails, place them side-by-side and mount them to create a triptych.
(Illustration)

11: Collage and Magazine Pictures

Materials:

Colorful magazine pages
Glue
Scissors
Paper

Process:

1. Keeping in mind the colors and textures of the sunflower, cut out small, medium and large color and texture patches from pages of magazines that resemble the colors and textures of the sunflower. These swatches will act as your color and texture palette.
2. As you cut these out, be thinking about larger background colors and shapes that might create larger spaces. You will be creating the sunflower in a collage/mosaic-like piece using the colorful magazine ink swatches that you have cut out.

Variation:

- Using the shapes of the sunflower create an abstract version in blacks, greys and whites.
- If you created an abstract version for the first process, try creating a full-color, realistic version.

12: Solar Prints

Materials:

Sun-printing paper from craft or museum shop
Leaves, flowers or other items of your choice
Water in a flat pan

Process:

1. Arrange your items on the sun-printing paper. Be careful not to move things once they are on the paper.
2. Expose the paper to sunlight for about five minutes.
3. Remove the objects.
4. Immediately put paper in water to "fix" the image so it will be permanent.

Variations:

- Cut out designs and glue to folded note card.
- Frame your prints.
- Make a collage of solar prints.
- Experiment with colored construction paper. No water needed. Just remove from the sunlight after about an hour and you will see the different shapes.

13: String Pictures

Materials:

Foamboard
Straight pins
Colored embroidery floss or sewing thread

Process:

1. Decide on a design based on a whole sunflower or separate elements of it.
2. Draw an outline of the design on the foamboard and press pins into the selected shape/s.
3. Use threads of several colors to wrap around and through the pins to develop your design.

14: Tissue paper overlay

Materials:

Heavy paper like posterboard
Several colors of tissue paper
Acrylic matte medium or Elmer's glue diluted with a little water
Soft, flat brush
Markers or felt tip pens

Process:

1. Tear the tissue paper into shapes, preferably creating rough edges.
2. Apply a coat of glue or medium to posterboard.
3. Lay pieces of torn tissue paper onto the board. These do not have to be in a particular pattern. (Overlapping them will result in interesting color combinations.)
4. Use markers or pens to draw a design of the sunflower on the dried tissue paper or to outline the torn papers.

15: Rubbings

Materials:

Actual plant or artificial flowers from a craft store (The flower will produce a better rubbing if you use separate parts for this process. It also works best if your plant material is flat or almost flat.)
Lightweight paper
Soft lead pencil or charcoal

Process:

Cover your plant parts with paper and, using a soft pencil or charcoal, lightly rub over the paper. An image of what you have arranged will appear on the paper.

16: Mono Prints

Materials:

Freezer paper
Poster paints or craft acrylic paints (in bottles)
Glycerine (available from pharmacy)
Paper to print

Process:

1. Mix about a teaspoon of glycerine into several teaspoons of each color of paint you want to use.
2. Fasten the freezer paper, shiny side up, to a drawing board or table top.
3. Paint your design on the freezer paper, being generous with the paint.
4. Before it dries, lay your print paper on the paint and lightly press it to transfer the image.
5. Carefully lift the print and let it dry. In some cases, you can refresh some of the paint and make another print.

17: Seed Designs

Materials:

Posterboard or foamboard
Elmers glue or other white glue
Acrylic paints
Sunflower seeds

Process:

1. Paint either a design or a background on the posterboard. Paint the seeds also if you wish.
2. Glue the seeds in a design of your choosing—floral, leaves, etc. This could be displayed in a frame that was also decorated with seeds.

18: Seed Jewelry

Materials:

Sunflower seeds
Plastic milk bottles
Acrylic or craft paints
Scissors
Jewelry findings—earrings, cords, ribbons, pin fasteners, etc.
(either used or purchased from a craft store)

Process:

1. Cut shapes for earrings, pins or necklaces from plastic bottles. Paint if desired.
2. Glue plain or painted seeds onto the shape in the designs of a flower or leaves.
3. Attach the decorated shapes to the jewelry pieces, making a hole for the ribbon or earring loop, or gluing to a pin fastener.

19: Stamping

Materials:

Pieces of fabric (torn sheets work fine)

Acrylic or fabric paint

Sponges, potatoes or cardboard to create a stamp design

Scissors or craft knives to cut shapes into the stamping materials (sponges, potatoes, etc.)

Foam brushes to apply paint

Process:

1. Fasten fabric to a hard surface.
2. Use a foam brush to apply paint, leaving abstract shapes in both thick and thin paint. Don't cover the whole surface. Let dry.
3. Cut a shape out of sponge, potato or cardboard.
4. Apply paint to the design you have created and stamp or imprint the fabric, leaving an imprint
5. on top and/or beside colors painted onto fabric.
6. The stamped fabric can be used as a wall hangings, pillow top, etc.

Variation: This method can also be used to paint t-shirts, but be sure to put cardboard between the front and back of the shirt so the paint doesn't stain through.

20: Paper Stencils

Materials:

Paper, blank note cards, envelopes

Paper from which to cut stencils

Cans of different colors of spray paint or toothbrushes and acrylic paint

Process:

1. Cut stencils using the sunflower theme. Use both the shape you cut and the paper it was cut from (positive and negative shapes).
2. Lay the stencil on the backing paper. Lightly spray. Lift the stencil and move it, change its direction, add other shapes, etc.
3. Lightly spray again, using the same color or a new one.
4. Continue until you have an interesting composition.

21: Paper Piercing

Materials:

Light cardboard (manila folders work well)
Floral pin
Paper towels
Pencil

Process:

1. Lightly draw a floral design onto cardboard.
2. Place the cardboard on top of several paper towels to provide a soft backing the pins can pierce into
3. Push the pin through the cardboard in the shape of the design you created.
4. The pierced cardboard can be hung in front of a lamp or a window so that light shines through the small holes.

22: Scratch board

Materials:

Paper
Crayons
Scraping tools, floral pins, long finishing nails

Process:

1. Using the crayons, lightly put colors onto the paper in no particular pattern.
2. Cover the entire surface of your paper thickly with a black or other dark color crayon.
3. Using the tools, press into the colored layers to create a sunflower-inspired shape or imprint.
4. The scraped surface will reveal the unexpected colors layered beneath.

Other ideas for arts projects:

Photography: photos of growing cycle with different seasons and stages of development, whole sunflower with roots, “opposite spirals” evident before disk flowers open or after seed has set, black and white photo revealing plant structure, closeup of flower or leaf with veins, looking down on plant, looking up into structure, etc. (see **Graphics Appendix B**)

Press flowers and leaves for hanging mobile

Sun sand painting

Dyeing

Floral arrangement



(Coloring guide can be found at schoolgardens.unl.edu)