



Youth Education Program

of San Francisco Botanical Garden Society

Garden Sketching Activities

Sketching in the Garden

While you might think of sketching as a classroom activity, we use sketching in the garden as a way to focus children's attention on the world around them. Careful observation and recording are tools all scientist use, helping them to discover the patterns and relationships in the natural world.

Science Sketching vs. Making Pretty Pictures

Tell your students that the sketching they will do is of real things that they see around them. When we do science sketching, we only draw what we really see in front of us. If we see a red flower, we draw a red flower. If we see a round leaf, we draw a round leaf. When we are making pretty pictures, we might draw a rainbow or a butterfly or a robot just because we like it, even if it's not really there. That's not what we're doing today though!

Before We Sketch, We Look

The goal of science sketching is to look carefully and to record information so we can remember it later. So before we draw, we look carefully and ask:

How many do we see? Petals, legs, spots, leaves?

What shapes do we see? Circles, ovals, triangles, squares?

What lines do we see? Round, pointy, straight?

What patterns do we see? Stripes, spots, zig zags?

What is a "Good" Sketch?

A good sketch records details that a child has noticed after careful observation. With young children you may not be able to recognize what they drew, so ask! Variation in development of hand/eye coordination means different children will have different skill levels. What matters is not how "pretty" the picture is, but how accurate in recording information.

Good feedback for children: "I like the way you drew that part of the leaf/the way you noticed those little spots/how you showed the pattern on the stem"

Not so great feedback: "Wow, that's a pretty butterfly!...oops, you mean it's not a butterfly?"



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Sketching Activity Rubric

Effective assessment of a sketching activity can be done using a simple rubric, tailored to your specific project. While the focus is on the sketch, students should be encouraged to use words as well to record information about the object. Tell your students which of the following their page should contain. You can then keep students on task and assess their work by seeing that they follow the specific guidelines you have given them.

Every sketch should have:

- Today's date
- An image of the object you are observing

Your sketch should also show (teacher chooses 3 to 5 of the following):

- Sketch of the whole object
- Close-up detail of part of the object
- Color or notes about color

- The name of the object
- Labels of the parts of the object
- Notes and descriptions of the object

- Indication of size of the object
- Indication of parts of sketch that are life-sized

- A question about what you see