

Activity: Nature Goal: Psychological Populations: Specialized Populations

TH Activity Plan – Nature Artwork- Bereaved

Text by Bree Stark & Lesley Fleming, HTR

Photo by Craftsonsea.co.UK



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will create art using plant materials.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Concentrate on activity at hand; complete artwork

Physical: Strengthen mind-body connections by thinking about art then using hands to complete it

Psychological/Emotional: Use distraction to reduce rumination if only for a while; express emotions using art

Sensory: Use multiple senses to experience joy, relief, distraction

Social: Engage with others; recognize others have experienced grief; compliment others on artwork

Materials

Poem duplicated - one for each participant

Colorful construction paper, glue, cotton swabs

Nature materials (leaves, bark, flowers, ornamental grasses, dried plants, cinnamon, cattail)

Cinnamon herbal tea, teapot, cups, sugar, cream, spoons, napkins, kleenex

Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:**
2. Facilitator begins session by reading the poem *In Blackwater Woods*. Participants have a copy to follow along.
3. Facilitator asks the group to identify plant items from the poem (trees as pillars of light, cattails floating away etc.)
4. Discuss why nature can be soothing, peaceful. Where in nature have participants found solace, peace? Facilitator can mention studies that support nature engagement fulfilling these roles (Bratman et al., 2015).
5. Group looks & touches items from poem: cinnamon, colorful leaves, bark, these items to be used in artwork. Items can be live, dried, fabric or photos. Select ones to be used for personal artwork.
6. Glue items onto a colorful piece of construction paper.
7. Group prepares and drinks cinnamon tea & observes/admires each person's art. On-going discussions related to connecting with nature, finding peace in outdoor settings or other relevant or organic topics can support the grief process.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Using artwork to address grief and feelings has been a therapeutic and recreational activity used across populations and ages offering many benefits. Incorporating nature into this artwork session is an opportunity to combine TH and art together where the idea of nature providing a healing environment, distraction, safe refuge and inspiration can be introduced. If possible, taking a walk outdoors can expand the activity. Or simply doing the nature-focused artwork can be combined with discussions on finding relief, solace and peace during the grieving process.

Psychological/Emotional Goals: Distracting from the continual ruminations associated with loss, grief, or concern for the future, can be provided by doing hands-on art, this providing relief and respite, if only for a while.

Expressing emotions where each participant, at a different point in their journey, can release feelings, be inspired by nature's beauty, and engage in sensory stimulation from nature's items, cinnamon tea or other.

Cognitive/Intellectual Goals: Many experiencing grief find their ability to concentrate is affected. Using a hands-on activity that can be short or longer depending on the group or the individual, can address and work towards completing the task at hand, while strengthening concentration skills. Selecting nature items for the artwork, designing their pattern, and then engaging with others complimenting participants on their art can support social and brain function as well as the integration of mind-body actions.

Social Goals: Engaging with others who have experienced grief, in a setting where emotional expression (crying, being quiet or passive) is accepted without judgement can demonstrate that being with others is possible under difficult circumstances. Recognizing others' grief can provide role-reversal and empathy for others, where the participant looks outward with a focus on someone (or others) besides themselves. Participating in creative artwork, complimenting others on their art, and looking at nature's beauty can distract from pain, loss and begin the practice of re-entering typical interactions with others in positive ways.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Use of gloves may be helpful for those with skin sensitivities. If drinking (cinnamon or other) tea is part of the session, allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication need to be identified.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Cinnamon's health benefits are receiving wider acceptance especially for its antioxidant, antibiotic and anti-inflammatory properties (WebMD, 2023). Using cinnamon tea during the session can provide warmth, sensory inputs, and suggestions for improving nutrition while integrating one of the poem's nature elements.

Nature's role in providing [healing spaces](#) is well documented including [shinrin-yoku](#). Using a poem, artwork or time in nature during the session can offer benefits which can be both immediate and long term. Discussing places in nature including walking in a neighborhood, sitting in a home garden or watching a sunset can prompt people to consider nature experiences (passive and active) in times of stress, loneliness, reflection and grief.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Bratman, G.N., Hamilton, J.P., Hahn, K.S., Daily, G.C. & Gross, J.J. (2015). Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. *Proc Nat Acad Sci USA*, 112
Oliver, M. (n.d.). [In blackwater woods \(poem\)](#).
Oliver, M. (n.d.). [Poems on grief by Mary Oliver](#).
WebMD. (2023). [Cinnamon: Health benefits and side effects](#).
Yang, J. (2013). *Time of grief: Mourning poems*. New Directions.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.

**In Blackwater Woods
By Mary Oliver**

“Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars
of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,
the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating
away over
the blue shoulders
of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is
nameless now.

Every year
everything
I have ever learned
in my lifetime
leads back to this: the
fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side
is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever
know.
To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones
knowing
your own life depends on
it;
and, when the
time comes to let it
go, let it go.

