

Activity: Nature Goal: Sensory Populations: Child/Youth

TH Activity Plan – Nature Collage

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Make a nature collage by placing stems of various plant material (flowers, grasses, sticks) through the hole in the cardboard.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Follow step-by-step instructions; attend to task

Physical: Develop bilateral hand use (holding cardboard with one hand while placing stems in holes with the other hand); increase fine motor strength & dexterity, eye-hand coordination.

Psychological/Emotional: Engage in new or novel sensory experience (without adverse reactions); self-regulate

Sensory: Stimulate the senses through touch, vision, smell, & movement

Social: Increase social interaction; follow adult direction; engage in group activity

Materials

Cardboard rectangles (~8x10")
Heavy duty scissors or box cutter for cutting cardboard
Screwdriver
Marker
Safety scissors
Long stemmed plant material
Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

- 1. Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator will prepare plain cardboard pieces that are approximately 8x10" and draw desired shape (vase, butterfly, or just write "Nature Walk, Butterfly Art, Nature Collage" at the top) on the cardboard pieces. Use a screwdriver to make holes in the cardboard. The number of holes can vary depending on the participants' abilities & amount of time available for the session. Write instructions for each station, placing them at the appropriate spot. If this activity is done indoors, facilitator can bring in a variety of >4" long stemmed plant material for participant to share and choose from.
- 2.** Greet students & teachers and show them a completed sample nature collage & how to place stems in cardboard.
- 3.** Rules are reviewed with participants such as staying with the class in the designated area, smelling but not eating items they pick, & staying away from large ant hills. Write instructions for each station's tasks, placing them where they can be seen.
- 4.** Participants are each given one piece of cardboard with a drawing & holes already made to put their stems/flowers in. Put participants name on their cardboard or have them write their names as able (marker, crayon).
- 5.** Facilitator and other participating adults lead participants to the outdoor area where they can pick stems of plant material of their choosing (see option below). Support participants as needed.
- 6.** When participants fill all the holes on their cardboard the facilitator can gather the group (indoors or outdoors) & can identify various sensory characteristics of plants found (texture, smell, color or plants/flowers, etc.) on participants collages. Likes & dislikes can also be a lively topic.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:

- If student is in wheelchair, the stemmed plant material can be brought to them or placed on a table within reach.
- Students with visual impairments may need holes in the cardboard that are slightly larger as well as plant material presented on a table rather than gathering material from an unfamiliar outdoor space.
- Students with language impairments may benefit from using a communication board to describe colors, textures, and characteristics of their plant material.
- If students can write their own name, they should be encouraged to do that.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

Talk to classroom teacher about safe outdoor location or completing this activity indoors based on participant and group strengths and needs (including insect bites and allergies). Ensure area where students will be picking plant material is clearly marked and/or free from toxic plants and insects. Avoid plants with excessive sap, thorns or sharpness. Sun protection and gloves are recommended. Teacher or facilitator are the only ones to use pruners and screwdrivers.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: This activity can be done in conjunction with an obstacle course. The *THAD Outdoor Obstacle Course* suggests movements like swinging, spinning and bear walking at stations located near certain plants, strengthening the plant/nature connection. Participants can set their nature collage to rest while completing the obstacle course/movement portion.

Adding movement and engaging the muscles adds additional strategies to support physical development as well as self-regulation including opportunities to activate the vestibular system (moving the head in a variety of positions), proprioception (or heavy work activities that activate the muscles), and body awareness (noticing textures and sensations when moving across surfaces with different textures). Movement can support practice regulating sensory responses.

Plant material appropriate for nature collages and which are probably being grown in areas like schoolyards, meadows, and parks can include: sunflowers, daisies, ixora, plumbago, clover, lamb's ear, cosmos, ageratum, strawflower, echinacea, rudbeckia, sedum, dusty miller. Herbs including salvia, basil, oregano, and thyme have fragrance, an added element to this sensory activity. Shrubbery can provide different textures, typically on strong stems: ixora, Indian hawthorn, forsythia, and sea grapes. Include tree leaves: maples, chestnut, and elm.

Some plant stems have thick stems and may be difficult to pick by hand (pussy willow, lilac, ornamental grass).

Options: Pre-cut stems and lay in pile near where the plant is growing in the ground, to be retrieved by participant. Or have volunteers with safety scissors near these plants – pass scissors to participant as they approach, avoiding them leaving with, or running with scissors.

If participants will be taking these collages home, tape can be used to secure the stems to the back of the cardboard. This activity can also be set up in many different ways to address academic content such as: 1:1 correspondence, color identification and matching, handwriting, and identifying same and different. All parts of this project are compostable.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Berger, R. (2023). [The benefits of obstacle courses.](#)
- Kinsner, K. (May 2019). [Rocking and rolling. Fresh air, fun, and exploration: Why outdoor play is essential for healthy development.](#) National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Thrive UK. (2024). [Create a nature walk cardboard vase.](#)
- Play Beyond the Lines. (2024). [DIY nature art display.](#) Play Beyond the Lines.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2024.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.