

Activity: Nature Goal: Psychological Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Shadow Drawing with Nature - Watercolors

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will trace shadow cast by natural objects using a dark pencil, then bring them to life with watercolors.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Acquire a new skill; examine nature with a creative lens

Physical: Practice calming strategies; strengthen pincer grip

Psychological/Emotional: Relax doing creative activity with nature

Sensory: Experience moments of awe & joy from nature; use powers/sense of observation, tactile skills

Social: Improve communication & pro-social behavior in a group setting

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

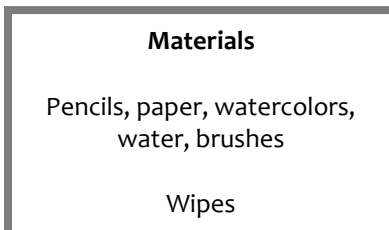
1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Select outdoor site for session, or bring nature items indoors. Make a sample.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing the activity, sharing a sample. Going outdoors, each participant selects a natural element (leaf, flower, twig) & places it on paper where sunlight casts a shadow.
3. Trace the shadow using a dark pencil, carefully tracing the outline of the shadow.
4. Add watercolors, painting inside or around the shadow. Use natural or abstract colors.
5. Try tracing a second shadow in a new position. Add watercolor layers for depth.
6. Share & reflect with the group. Look at the artwork, notice how shadows change, give positive feedback and praise to others.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Shadow drawing with watercolors blends the calming act of tracing with the freedom of painting. It helps participants slow down, notice the little details in nature, and creates something unique for each person. Shadows remind us of the ever-present

dance between light and darkness in nature. They are not just empty spaces but storytellers, timekeepers, and protectors in the natural world.

Therapeutic goals for this TH activity will be based on participant or group goals. They can focus on physical domain goals of strengthening hands, pincer grip or hand-eye coordination. Psychological goals can involve using nature to ease anxiety, or learn relaxation techniques. Other therapeutic goals are listed above in the goal box.

Therapeutic techniques can include using adaptive tools, paintbrushes or pencils for example, with wider diameter. For people with vision impairments, doing the activity in bright light, on a sunny day, or with enhanced



light at an outdoor table can support success. Using very dark pencils or black marker, and bright colored, saturated watercolor paints will also be helpful.

Techniques for creative work: How Shadows Are Formed in Nature - Shadows appear when an object blocks light. The sun, the greatest natural light source, shines down and anything in its path—trees, flowers, animals, even people—creates a dark outline on the ground or nearby surfaces. Shadows change in size and direction throughout the day:

- In the morning and late afternoon, shadows are long because the sun is low in the sky.
- At noon, shadows are shortest because the sun is directly overhead.

The colors, shapes, and clarity of a shadow also depend on the strength of the light. A bright sunny day creates sharp, crisp shadows, while a cloudy day softens or even erases them.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Outdoor area should be free from hazards, poisonous plants and be accessible for all participants. Some participants may need closer supervision if they have a tendency to put items (paint, leaves) in mouths.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Interesting Facts About Shadows

- Ancient clocks: Before modern clocks, people told time by watching shadows on a sundial. The moving shadow showed the hour of the day.
- Cooling effect: Plants cast shadows that help keep soil moist and cool, protecting roots and smaller plants from drying out.
- Animal helpers: Some animals use shadows for survival. Lizards may bask in the sun but dash into shadows to regulate their body temperature.
- Storytelling in light: In many cultures, shadows have been used for storytelling—like shadow puppetry in Indonesia and China, where figures cast shadows on a screen to tell myths and folktales.
- Personal shadows: Every person has a unique shadow, shaped by their body and the way light falls. Even identical twins will have slightly different shadows.

Stories & Symbolism

- In literature and folklore, shadows are often seen as mysterious or magical. Some traditions say shadows hold a part of our soul, while others believe they remind us of our constant connection to the sun.
- Shadows can symbolize both comfort and mystery—they offer cool shelter on hot days but can also spark the imagination with shapes that shift and stretch.
- Artists throughout history have been fascinated by shadows, using them to create drama, mood, and perspective in their work.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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Peabody Essex Museum. (n.d.). [Shadow drawing in nature](#). *PEM.org*.

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Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2025.