

VIRTUAL ART EXHIBITION LESSON PLAN: ELEMENTARY

The Children & Nature Network is hosting a virtual art exhibition, ***NatureFuture: Kids' Visions for a Just and Nature-filled World***, for kids and teens to share visual art, poetry, and creative writing to inspire a just, nature-filled future! Work will be viewable online starting May 20, 2021. Does your class want to participate? This lesson plan includes a suggested timeline and resources, but you are also welcome to approach it in whatever way works best for your class!

TIME: 1-3 SESSIONS

If your school is learning in-person, you may be able to finish this lesson in one class period. If your school is hybrid or learning virtually, you'll probably need several sessions depending on how your schedule is broken up.

If you are working with older elementary students, you may want to expand it to 2-3 sessions so you can dig into art concepts and techniques further. (Start in black and white one day, add color another, etc.).

You can use this assignment to focus on art, english language arts, civics, and/or environmental literacy (or several of them) depending on teacher and student interest. For older students, this could be a jumping off point to begin to talk about environmental justice in an age-appropriate way.

Check out this toolkit from the Children & Nature Network: [Talking With Kids About Equitable Nature Access](#)

LEARN:

Talk with students about nature in their area (schoolyards, backyards, local parks, community gardens, etc.) As a class, make a list of places where students find nature. If some students can't think of anywhere, discuss as a class whether or not it's fair that not everyone has a place where they can be in nature. If your school is not in an urban area, ask students how people who live in a city are able to experience nature.



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Encourage students to think about some ways nature makes them feel (happy, calm, adventurous etc.). Suggested resources: *Charlotte and the Quiet Place*, by Deborah Sosin, Sara Woolley and/or *Wild Mindfulness* by Laura Larson

Ask students to brainstorm some ways that they could make their natural spaces better. Would they want to expand the natural space? Improve it in some way? How? Would they make sure that all of their friends have access to nature? What about people who live in a city? How could they make sure more people can experience nature? Could they improve the space for animals? As a class, make a graphic organizer that shows all of the different ways students can imagine making their world and their natural space a better place.

Ideally, students are able to be outside experiencing these spaces while brainstorming, but if not, look at some examples of different types of natural spaces.

CREATE:

Students will then choose an idea from the graphic organizer to inspire a work of art or writing that shows how they would **make the world a better place**. If students are having trouble getting started, ask them some leading questions like:

- What is a unique place where you could put a new park in a city?
- What things would make a park more welcoming for animals (or a particular animal you might have learned about or observed locally)?
- How could we make parks and nature equally available to everyone?
- How could we all spend more time in nature?

For the exhibition, artwork can be 2D or 3D and use any technique or medium (a photograph will be submitted). Written works should be 500 words or less.

EXAMPLES:

Visual artists who envision a better world (view the slides [here](#))

Fritz Haag, Edible Estates and Animal Estates

This artist creates vegetable gardens in people's front lawns and recreates the habitats of animals that used to live in cities before people came and removed nature.



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Robert Smithson, Floating Island

This artist envisioned a barge that contained native plants that used to grow where New York City is now floating in the surrounding harbor. (This project was realized posthumously.)

Mary Mattingly, Swale

This sculpture visually looks similar to “Floating Islands” but is a floating food forest built atop a barge that travels to piers in New York City, offering educational programming and welcoming visitors to harvest herbs, fruits and vegetables for free. How is Mattingly’s vision for the future different from Smithson’s?

The Living Studio, Hy-Fi

These artists/architects create buildings by growing bricks out of mushrooms! At the top of the tower you’ll see a row of shiny blocks, which serve as the molds in which the bricks grow.

Stefano Boeri, Bosco Verticale

This architect has put a park in an interesting place! The towers have heights of 360 feet and 249 feet respectively and host 900 trees (each measuring 10-30 feet) and over 2,000 plants from a wide range of shrubs and floral plants.

Before It’s Too Late (public art nonprofit), Bronzeville Renaissance

This organization partners with artists, climate activists, and government agencies to paint murals and design augmented reality (AR) videos that bring awareness to climate solutions. “Bronzeville Renaissance” portrays prominent figures from the historically Black neighborhood’s past, while directing viewers to a 3D modeling app (which they can view from their smartphones) that imagines a greener future for the city.

Corinne Caro, Game Backgrounds

Caro is a video game designer from the Philippines who “loves imagining a future where nature grows over human spaces.”

Rick Guidice, The Cylinder Colony (interior), The Toroidal Colony

In 1975, NASA began to conceptualize living conditions in space—hiring illustrator Guidice to bring the ideas to life. The resulting works actively shaped the public perception of life off Earth, and do so to this day.

Writers and Poets who envision a better world

[Poet Laureate Amada Gorman](#)

The youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, as well as an award-winning writer. Her poem [Talking Gets Us There](#) is appropriate for elementary students and will be included in her forthcoming book *Change Sings*.



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[Solli Raphael](#)

A 13-year-old poet, Solli Raphael asks "what kind of human are you, what kind am I?" Solli's unique and emotive poetry aims to explore human action towards environmental sustainability.

[Brandon Sanders and Mikeala Miller](#)

In "If you Give a Child a Word" two students explain the power of poetry.

[Climate Museum's Student Poetry Slam](#)

High school students from across the city came to describe, in rhythm and rhyme, a rapidly warming planet. Use your judgement about showing this to an elementary audience, some are more age appropriate than others.

[A Love Poem to Our Earth](#)

Lindi Nolte "I grew up as a barefoot kid in South Africa ..." begins spoken word artist, Lindi Nolte, with her inspiring poem about where her love for nature was born and why the beauty of our planet is vital in our lives. Through storytelling, vivid imagery, and poetic expression, Lindi reminds us of our deep connection with the living world and urges us to protect it.

[Rachel Carson and Her Book That Changed the World](#) by Laurie Lawl

[Rainbow Weaver](#) by Tejedora del Arcoiris by Linda Elovitz Marshall

[One Plastic Bag](#): Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia by Miranda Paul

[Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table \(Food Heroes\)](#) Jacqueline Briggs Martin

STANDARDS (USA ONLY):

National Core Arts Standards

VA:Cr1.1 - Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

VA:Re8.1 - Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

VA:Cn11.1 - Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding



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Common Core ELA Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.8

With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.8

Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.8

Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

States all use different Social Studies Standards, but there is likely to be something about fairness, rules and responsibilities in yours.

MATERIALS:

Visual Art: the exhibition is open to all 2D and 3D artwork, make sure that you document the work with a high quality photo. Finished work will be displayed digitally.

Poetry/ Creative Writing: Journals, workbooks or however students are currently submitting written work. Make sure you are able to submit in a format that can be displayed digitally (text or photos). Length limit 500 words.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Deadline to submit art is April 30. Use this form to [submit online](#)

Online exhibition will open on May 20.

Additional information is available at <https://www.insideoutleadershipseries.org>

Questions? Please contact the organizers at conference@childrenandnature.org



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