

VIRTUAL ART EXHIBITION LESSON PLAN:

MIDDLE GRADES

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.

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. Middle School students could use this as a jumping off point to begin to talk about social and environmental justice.

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 that students go to find nature in their communities. See if everyone can think of a place where they see nature and talk about why some students can't think of anything. Do some students have barriers to nature access? What about others in your community? Are there socio-economic barriers? Physical ones? Why do they think nature is more available in wealthier communities? Are there other barriers to interacting with nature?



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From the climate crisis, to COVID, to protests erupting around the U.S. in a fight to end systemic racism, the future can seem uncertain. Nature can help us through the tough times. Reimagining our relationship with nature will help us create the world we want to live in.

Next ask students to think about some ways nature makes them feel (happy, calm, adventurous, etc.).

Ask students to brainstorm some ways that they could make their natural spaces better or more accessible. Would they want to expand the natural space? Improve it in some way? How? How would they improve everyone's 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 natural world 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 brainstorming session to inspire a work of art or literature 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 innovative place could you put a new park in a city? How would it improve access for people who have none?
- 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 equitably 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: check the slides [here](#).



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Fritz Haag, Edible Estates and Animal Estates

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

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 110 metres (360 ft) and 76 metres (249 ft) respectively and host 900 trees (each measuring 3, 6 or 9 meters or 10-30 ft) 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 artist 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.



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Writers and Poets who envision a better world:

[Poet Laureate Amada Gorman](#)

Complete remarks from Amanda Gorman at the Presidential Inauguration. "There is always a light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."

[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.

[Ali Jacs](#)

Performance poet and former New Zealand National Poetry Slam champion Alina Siegfried AKA Ali Jacs performs her poem "Humanity Stands" at New Frontiers summit, hosted by the Edmund Hillary Fellowship.

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

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.

Activists who envision a better world:

[Rachel Carson](#)

[Wangari Maatthai](#) and the Green Belt Movement

[Isatou Ceesay](#) and One Plastic Bag

[Will Allen](#) Founder of Growing Power

[Winona LaDuke](#) Founder of Honor the Earth

[Greta Thunberg](#) Student climate activist

And many, many more!!



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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

Common Core ELA Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1.A

Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1.B

Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.5

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

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, just make sure that you document the work with a high quality photo. Finished work will be displayed digitally.



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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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