

Create a Living Picture

Debra M. Tate-Anderson

If you offer it, they will come! Fifth- through eighth-grade students at the Strodes Mills Middle School eagerly took up the suggestion. "Let's build an outdoor garden,". Immediately, the meetings were scheduled and the digging began. At least thirty students and a handful of parents stayed after school to help build the flower garden. It is now called the Garden Classroom and has four picnic tables with umbrellas, surrounded by four walls of perennials and shrubs. Many donations of plants from parents, staff, and community members contributed to continual growth.



Mulching the garden.



Mulching the garden.



Drawing in the garden.

“ Students can enjoy the garden as a source of inspiration. The plants and objects in the garden invite the eye to observe closely. One can almost hear the flowers whispering: ‘come closer, look at me.’ Life is too fast. From fast food to the quick flipping of the remote, patience is a difficult lesson. Artists know that developing good observation skills takes years of practice. What better place to begin this slowing of the senses than the flower garden? ”

The Garden Classroom is a place where my students can observe real flowers, foliage, and objects; a place where they can sketch as artists might do when creating works of art from nature. To truly see and appreciate, a student needs hands-on experiences to observe closely, to touch, smell, hear, and feel the serenity—a perfect environment for learning.



Garden plan painting. Kody Hassinger. grade six.



Hummingbird Feeder for Garden. Ashton Amspacker. grade six.

Art experiences should go beyond the walls of an artroom. Think of gardening as a fine art and an extension of art class. Imagine what could happen if mulch, soil, plants, shovels, and rakes became standard art tools and media. Building a garden offers students a different type of canvas to create a living picture. This living picture truly activates all the senses. Children should not grow up thinking that art is only using crayons and paint or making drawings or painting pictures.

A number of sixth-grade students helped to plan the garden. Students painted their flower garden sketches in the artroom with acrylic paints, showing values of each color. My sixth-grade students are particularly good at painting values because they have practiced this skill since the third grade. This is an advantage of teaching kindergarten through seventh grade art. One not only knows the students personally, but knows what they have experienced—and mastered.

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Students throughout the school district observed the vacant plot of ground change almost magically into a beautiful flower garden. They saw a weightless idea grow, change, and become a reality. The garden stimulates curiosity and is aesthetically pleasing. Outdoor beauty generates good feelings, especially when we have created it ourselves. Appreciation for nature and creating artistic environments is an art lesson that should be part of a good curriculum. Building the garden was the ultimate cooperative learning experience. Designing and planting gardens is of great interest to children and should be a part of every child's education.



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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students compare multiple purposes for creating works of art.

WEB LINK

eelink.net/eeactivities-schoolgardens.html

www.hort.vt.edu/human/childrenlinks.html

Sunflowers. Wesley Biddle. grade six.

