

The Little Sprouts Workshop: Designing a Montessori Nature Paint Lesson

Materials Needed

- **For Ganeva (The Teacher-in-Training):**
 - A notebook or journal
 - Pencil or pen
 - A camera or phone (optional, for taking pictures of your setup)
 - Index cards or a small piece of thick paper (like cardstock)
 - Colored pencils or markers
- **For Your Montessori Activity (The Little Sprouts):**
 - A sturdy tray or baking sheet
 - A small basket or bowl for collecting nature items
 - A small pitcher for water
 - Several small bowls or containers (yogurt cups or ramekins work well)
 - A small mortar and pestle, or a sturdy bowl and the back of a spoon
 - Sturdy paintbrushes with thick handles
 - Thick paper (watercolor paper or cardstock is best)
 - A smock or old t-shirt for the "child"
 - Natural items collected from outside: mud/dirt, soft berries (like blackberries or raspberries), flower petals (like marigolds or pansies), soft green leaves, charcoal from a fire pit (with permission!).

Lesson Plan

Core Montessori Principles for Today's Lesson

Before we begin, let's remember our goals. A great Montessori activity is built on a few key ideas:

- **Hands-On Exploration:** Children learn by doing, touching, and experimenting. Our lesson must be interactive.
- **Follow the Child:** The activity should be an invitation, not a command. We observe what the child is interested in and allow them to explore at their own pace.
- **Connection to Nature:** Using natural materials connects children to the world around them and provides rich sensory experiences.
- **Child-Sized Tools:** Everything should be sized for little hands to promote independence.

Part 1: The Spark - Thinking Like a Teacher (10 minutes)

Your group has children from 1.5 to 4 years old. They are very different! In your notebook, create two columns. Label one "Little Toddler (1.5 years)" and the other "Preschooler (4 years)." Brainstorm the differences. Think about:

- How long can they pay attention?
- How do they use their hands (fine motor skills)?
- What is their main goal? (e.g., exploring with their mouth, making a picture that looks like something)
- What kind of instructions can they understand?

This chart will be your guide as you design your activity!

Part 2: The Adventure - Foraging for Colors (15 minutes)

Time to go outside! Take your collection basket and gather materials you think could make colors. Look for things you can safely crush or mix with water.

- **For brown/black:** soil, mud, soft charcoal.
- **For green:** soft leaves, grass (try grinding them with a little water).
- **For red/purple:** soft, overripe berries, dark flower petals.
- **For yellow:** dandelion heads or marigold petals.

As you collect, think about the textures, smells, and colors. This is the sensory experience your little students will have!

Part 3: The Workshop - Creating Your "Nature Paint" Lesson (25 minutes)

Now you will design the activity. Your goal is to create a workstation on a tray that is beautiful, inviting, and easy for a child to understand just by looking at it.

1. **Prepare the Paints:** In your small bowls, experiment with making paints. Place a small amount of your nature items in the mortar or a sturdy bowl. Add a tiny bit of water and grind/mash to release the color. Prepare one bowl for each color.
2. **Set Up The Tray:** Arrange your materials on the tray in a logical, left-to-right order. A good flow would be: Paper on the left, then the bowls of "paint," then the paintbrushes, and finally a small sponge for clean-up. This creates a sense of order.
3. **The Differentiation Challenge:** Look back at your chart from Part 1. How can you make this ONE activity work for ALL ages?
 - **For the Little Toddler (1.5 - 2 years):** Their goal is sensory exploration.
 - **Modification:** Offer only one or two colors (like mud paint) to avoid overwhelm. Use very sturdy, thick paper. The main goal is the experience of painting, not the result. Be prepared for them to use their hands instead of the brush! Ensure all materials are non-toxic and taste-safe.
 - **For the Older Child (3 - 4 years):** Their goal is more purposeful creation.
 - **Extension:** Offer all the colors. Ask them questions like, "I wonder what would happen if we mixed the berry color and the leaf color?" You can also provide different tools, like a stick or a feather, to paint with. They might want to paint a specific picture of a flower or their family.
4. **Create Your Activity Card:** On an index card, draw the simple steps for the activity. Montessori lessons often use very few words. Your card could have three simple drawings: 1. A picture of a paintbrush being dipped in a pot. 2. A picture of the paintbrush making a mark on paper. 3. A picture of the paintbrush being placed back on the tray. This visual guide helps children understand the process independently.

Part 4: The Teacher's Turn - Practice Presentation (15 minutes)

Now, pretend you are presenting this lesson to a child for the first time. You can ask a parent or sibling to be your "student," or just talk through the steps out loud.

1. **The Invitation:** Approach your "student" calmly. Say something gentle and inviting, like, "Ganeva, I have something to show you. Would you like to see how to paint with nature?"
2. **The Demonstration:** Carry the tray carefully to a small table. Sit down and move through the steps slowly and deliberately, without talking. Use exaggerated, clear hand motions. Pick up the brush. Dip it slowly into the "paint." Make one or two strokes on the paper. Wipe any drips with the sponge. Place the brush down. Your movements are the instructions.
3. **The Hand-off:** Once you are done, offer the brush to the child. Say, "Now, it's your turn. Would you like to try?"
4. **The Observation:** Step back and watch. The hardest—and most important—part of being a

Montessori teacher is not correcting the child! Let them explore. If they mix colors, great! If they paint on the tray, that's okay! Your job is to ensure they are safe and to observe what they are learning.

Part 5: Reflection - The Growing Teacher (5 minutes)

In your notebook, answer these questions:

- What was the most challenging part of designing an activity for multiple ages at once?
 - What did you enjoy most about this process: the nature walk, making the paints, or practicing the presentation?
 - If you did this with a real group of children, what do you predict the 4-year-old would do? What do you predict the 1.5-year-old would do?
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Assessment: Show What You Know!

Use this simple checklist to see if your lesson design was a success. Give yourself a check for each point you completed.

- ☐ The activity tray is organized, clean, and inviting.
- ☐ The materials are child-sized and safe for the youngest age.
- ☐ I have a clear plan to modify the activity for a younger toddler.
- ☐ I have a clear plan to extend the activity for an older preschooler.
- ☐ My "Activity Card" uses simple pictures to show the steps.
- ☐ I practiced presenting the lesson using slow movements and few words.

Amazing work, teacher Ganeva! You've successfully designed a creative, engaging, and thoughtful Montessori lesson.