

Art Lesson/Unit Plan Title or Theme: Birch Trees

Appropriate Grade Level(s) 2nd-6th Days/Time required 2) 45-60 minute sessions

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Concept: Students will explore the life cycle of a birch tree connecting science, visual art techniques, and language art concepts.

Objective(s): *Students will be able to understand*

- *why the colors of leaves change while exploring warm and analogous color schemes with paint (Fall tree version).*
- *The function of tree bark and how to represent its texture with pen and ink*
- *Represent a light source to create the illusion of three dimensionality through shadows (Winter Birch trees)*
- *Explore cool and analogous color schemes and the chemical reaction of salt and water color (Winter Birch trees)*

Academic Core Subjects/Standards :

- **Life Science: life cycle of a tree**
- **Language Arts: Creative writing**

Procedures: *This project can explore either the winter or fall cycle of a birch tree, depending on the season. After discussing why leaves change color or why they lose their leaves, I show photographs of landscapes of birch trees in Fall or Winter. The two lessons cover some different concepts so the focus will change depending on the lesson. See the images for details.*

1. **Paint the Background:** Fall, use warm colors next to one another on the color wheel. You may choose to add a horizon and sky or just fill with warm colors in large organic shapes. Winter. Start with a horizon high on the page. Create a wash of blue water color by starting with a pool of water in the lid of the box and adding blue with purple or with green. Paint above the horizon with water only, then from top to bottom with wash only over the wet area. While still wet, sprinkle with salt, discuss the chemical reaction. Allow the backgrounds to dry.
2. **Trees:** Using photographs for reference, have the students draw tree trunks on white paper (I use a translucent paper) with black markers, making parallel lines of various spacing. The trunks should run from the top to the bottom of the paper. They can be straight or curvy. Point out the horizontal lines across the trunks, the dots, and the markings that look like eyes. Discourage vertical marks. Encourage them to add bumps and partial branches. After they have filled the page, have the students cut them out.
3. The next session the students will remove salt and draw in the fence along the horizon of the winter scene. For both landscapes, the students should place their trees on the background and consider which ones they want to use. Wider ones in the foreground, narrower in the background. Overlapping helps to make the scene look more 3D. Winter trees that are emerging from the snow should have wider trees at the bottom of the page and narrower ones higher on the page. They should have a slightly rounded bottom and extend off the top of the page. Select which trees to use and glue them on with Elmer's glue.
4. Winter trees have an additional step of creating a light gray wash and painting a shadow that extends at an angle from the base of the tree to the bottom of the page. Point out that all shadows should be running the same direction. Before actually painting, have the students trace the direction of the shadows with their finger, based on where they believe the sun is backlighting the trees.

5. Fall trees can add piles of tissue paper leaves at the base of the trees if desired.

Medium/Resources/Materials/Technology/Prep:

Winter Trees: Water colors, watercolor paper, translucent white paper, markers, salt, brushes, photographs of birch trees in winter, and close up pictures of bark, and/or actual bark.

Fall trees: I used tempera, large brushes, heavy weight drawing paper, translucent white paper, markers, photographs of birch trees in fall, and close up pictures of bark, and/or actual bark

Art Vocabulary:

Foreground

Background

Light source

Contrast

Analogous Colors

Warm and Cool Colors

Watercolor wash

Texture

Depth

Scale

Summary/Closure/ Reflection/ Critique:

Students are read a poem about the feelings of a tree and asked to write a poem about what their tree is feeling as it stands in its grove.

One link to a sad poem about a tree being cut down...[Tree Poem](#)

Display the poems with the art work .

Differentiation/Extension: *include how this lesson could be improved*

Images



If I were a tree I would be bored. I don't want the worms to kill me. I would see humans having so much fun. The branches on my body feel uncomfortable. I want to be a human so bad. I want to have friends. Jonah

If I was a tree I would feel lonely. I would like the animals to climb me. I would be cold in the night. I would take a fairly long nap in the winter. Marley

You feel out of all. You wake in the breeze. When naughty children pick your bark you say, "Ouch!" If you start feeling old you might crash down on the ground. If someone puts a birdhouse on your Wooded branch, you feel the weight. Ethan

I think I would not like to stand all day. I would like to fall over. I would like to have 20 arms so I can grab lots of things. I would throw birds. A.J.

You would be blown around in a storm. It wouldn't feel good. A lot of your leaves would fall off. The caterpillars would eat your leaves. A wood pecker would peck your trunk. A kid would climb on you. Someone could...



My trees bark is bumpy. It lives in the yard. Creatures running around on the branches feel ticklish. Its roots are under ground. It has small and medium branches. My tree is a sapling.

Kelli



