

Out and About with Preschoolers: Visual Arts for Everyone



It's a beautiful day to be outdoors with the children. But is there any way to help them explore fine arts concepts while outdoors? Yes, there is! Go ahead—take visual arts outside! Think big and think of everyone when you have a chance to do outdoor visual arts activities!

Sidewalk art

Provide large pieces of chalk, dry or moistened with water, so children can make big drawings on sidewalks or playground surfaces. You might also set out buckets of water and paintbrushes in various sizes so children can “paint” with water. Or fill empty squeeze bottles with water and let children squeeze designs onto the sidewalk.

Try this adaptation: Sidewalk chalk holders are great for students who need assistance holding chalk or who have a sensitivity to the chalk’s texture.

Murals

Anchor a large piece of butcher paper or kraft paper to the ground. Provide a variety of tempera colors. Invite children to paint an abstract mural using drip or spatter techniques. Or fasten a long sheet of paper or fabric to a fence or wall. Offer crayons, markers, or paint and ask each child to draw or paint something they see on the school grounds as part of a mural.

Clay work

Cover work surfaces with a smooth, nonporous material such as plastic. Give children damp clay in fist-sized lumps and let them pound, pinch, roll, cut, coil, and press it. Invite them to make representations of things they see outdoors. For variety, offer nontoxic modeling clay or a large batch of PlayDoh.

Try this adaptation: Let children who don’t enjoy touching clay use sculpting tools or plastic silverware to make designs in their clay.

Sculpture and 3-D design

Introduce children to the work of Andy Goldsworthy and other artists who create art in natural settings with leaves, twigs, mud, snow, dust, flowers, or rocks. Help them design and plan individual or group projects. “How will you stick the leaves together?” “What will keep your rock pile steady?” Photograph the children’s work so others can enjoy it even after nature reclaims it.

Landscapes

Talk with the children about landscape paintings by artists from a variety of cultures. Ask, “What would you paint in landscapes we could see from our playground?” Let children take turns painting landscapes on easels set up outdoors.

Try this adaptation: Some students may struggle with the abstractness of a blank piece of paper. Provide outline-type drawings for students to paint.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



Children’s Research Center
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386
Toll-free: 877-275-3227
E-mail: iel@illinois.edu
<https://illinoisearlylearning.org>



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