Tree and Nature Collage

**Big Idea**
Using art to raise awareness and make the world a better place

**Your students will:**
- Explore trees as artistic inspiration through sketching, texture rubbings and more
- Create a collage using their own tree-inspired art
- Understand how art can be used in activism and to raise awareness of important issues

**Visit Diane Burko’s Studio with Freddie and Ty**
As a class, co-view the clip from the episode “Collage and More Trees Please!” in which Freddie visits artist Diane Burko’s studio. Diane invites Freddie and Ty to learn how she makes art with an important message about climate change. Freddie and Ty help Diane create a collage about trees and deforestation (how forests and trees are being destroyed around the world). Prompt a discussion about art as a form of activism. Conversation starters might include:

1. Freddie wishes she saw more trees in her neighborhood and creates a campaign called “More Trees Please” to spread the word. What are some slogans or campaigns that you’ve heard about? Can you create one of your own for something important to you?
2. What is an activist? Diane Burko uses art in her activism to spread awareness about climate change. What are the ways we can be activists for change in our communities?
3. Why are trees so important to the environment? What did Diane share with Freddie and Ty about climate change that you didn’t know before?

**Lesson Activity**

**Teacher Prep:**
1. This activity occurs in two parts and involves going outside, which might require more than one class period. Think about how you would like to structure the students' time and feel free to adapt the lesson plan steps in a way that fits your classroom structure.
2. Think ahead about where you’ll take your class outdoors to observe and interact with trees. If it's challenging or takes too much time to go outside, make plans to draw from photos instead.
3. Prepare supplies. Make sure you have plenty of paper and drawing supplies ready for the outdoor portion of the lesson plan, along with books or cardboard for students to lean on while sketching.
Materials

Part 1: Outdoor Supplies
- Access to trees
- Several sheets of paper per student
- Colored pencils
- Crayons
- Something to lean on while drawing, such as a hardcover book
- Baskets, bins or reusable bags for collecting natural materials

Part 2: Indoor Supplies
- Cardboard or thick paper for the base of each student’s collage
- Photos of trees (these can be photos students have taken themselves, internet images or clippings from newspapers or magazines)
- Scissors
- Glue and tape

Instructions

Part 1: Get Outside
1. Head outside and have students take a seat in view of some trees. Hand out colored pencils and invite your students to sketch the trees from all different angles. You might even be able to find some shadows cast by the trees. Try tracing the tree shadows onto your paper.
2. Invite students to create tree bark rubbings on a fresh piece of paper. Press the paper to a tree trunk, and use the side of a crayon to cover the paper with color. Notice how it captures the trunk’s texture. Experiment with layering rubbings from different trees on top of one another in different colors.
3. Lastly, invite students to find and collect natural materials to use in their collages. Gather up fallen leaves, twigs or bits of bark into a bin or basket to include in your tree collage.

Part 2: Collage Indoors
1. Invite students to lay out and sort through their sketches, tree rubbings and foraged materials. Provide additional images of trees from magazines or photos for them to incorporate as well.
2. Students arrange and rearrange their materials on top of a piece of cardboard. Encourage students to overlap, cut and deconstruct their materials while planning out their collage.
3. Once they’ve settled on an arrangement, students glue or tape the materials to the cardboard base.
4. Remind students that their collages can have a message. What message do they hope their work communicates? Prompt students to give their collage a title and to write a description that speaks to their work’s message.

5. Display students’ artworks, and have a class discussion about their similarities and differences. Reflect on the process of creating them and gathering inspiration from the outdoors.

**Vocabulary**

**Activism:** Speaking up for what you believe is right and telling others about the things that are important to you and your community

**Collage:** An artwork made from many different materials and pieces of paper

**Sketch:** A quick drawing

**Environment:** The physical space around us

**Climate Change:** The way the Earth is getting hotter and weather patterns are changing because of how people are treating the planet

**Deforestation:** Knocking down and destroying forests and trees, which contributes to climate change

**Tips and Extensions**

- Incorporate paint into your collages like Diane does in her large-scale works. Paint objects collected from nature to add to the collage, or dip them into paint to make prints.
- Continue the conversation about activism, and invite students to create a collage around another topic that they think is important.
- Taking care of the environment is a big part of this episode. Extend the lesson by researching climate change with your class. Investigate how deforestation plays a role in global warming. Discuss with your class what the students and their families can do in their lives to help care for the environment.

**School-to-Home Connection**

- Our environment is constantly changing. Find an outdoor spot that you visit regularly outside of school to observe over time. This could be your backyard, the park or any other outdoor space. Snap some photos at different times of day and different times of year, or simply spend some quality time sketching the natural environment. Try to notice and pay attention to the space. What does it feel like, look like or smell like? Keep your sketches or images of this space and watch as it changes through seasons and over time.
- Students can be activists in their own communities. Talk with them about their carbon footprints and the ways they and their families can help take care of the planet, from recycling to conserving energy and water to raising awareness about climate change.
More about Diane Burko
Diane Burko is an artist and environmental activist located in Philadelphia who shows her work internationally. She is a photographer and painter and captures how human activity has impacted our environment. Diane’s earlier work focuses on painting natural landscapes, while her most recent work focuses on photographing the same areas she painted years ago to capture the way that our carbon footprint has changed the landscape. Diane is interested in depicting nature’s beauty but also the damage and changes that have been made to it due to global warming. View more of Diane Burko’s work and learn about her focus on the intersection between art and the environment at DianeBurko.com.

More Classroom Activities
Visit PBS LearningMedia for more lesson plans like this inspired by The Infinite Art Hunt.

Children’s Books with Related Themes
Check out these children’s books online or at your local library to continue exploring the concepts in this episode.

We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom
The environmental activism of Indigenous peoples is the focus of this book about a young girl who stands up in protest when a snake threatens to destroy Earth.

City Green by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan
A young girl is determined to turn an abandoned lot in the middle of a city block into a community garden.

Greta and the Giants by Zoë Tucker
The story of the Swedish activist and teenager Greta Thunberg, told through the lens of a fairytale in which giants threaten Greta’s home.