



ACTIVITY 1

Observational drawings of local leaf species

This activity provides an opportunity for students to explore the appearance of leaves from their local natural environment. It is essential that the leaves observed are native to the local area, as later in the program this will provide a link to the concept of the students' work and that of other artists.

Curriculum

Content descriptions

Western Australian Curriculum

Artistic processes and techniques to explore visual conventions when making artworks: shape, colour, space and texture.

Australian Curriculum Version 8

Use materials, techniques and processes to explore visual conventions when making artworks (ACAVAM111).

Materials

Stimulus – a collection of native leaves. For this example, Western Australian species such as marri, jarrah and peppermint tree leaves were used.
2B lead pencils, sharpeners, masking tape.
Paper for drawing.

Activity

Display some examples of leaves from local native trees. Broadly discuss observations with students, e.g., smell and use. What other information do students know about the leaves?
Explain that over the series of lessons, students will create a series of drawings. These will use different techniques exploring the leaves. These will be used later, as inspiration for a painting and collage artwork.
Depending on students' prior knowledge, teach and/or review drawing techniques.
Review blind contour, contour and observational drawing techniques, see *Teacher notes.
Students to set up workspace for a blind contour drawing and choose a leaf to draw.
Discuss:
Warming up for drawing using the blind contour drawing technique.
Why masking tape is used to secure the paper, and the different ways artists may use contour drawing techniques.
Students draw using the blind contour technique.
Using the same leaf, students continue with a contour drawing and then an observational drawing.

Teacher notes

* Drawing using observational techniques requires students to look carefully at what they see and draw it. Students' perceptions of observational drawing can vary greatly, depending on their experiences and understanding. Some are confident. Others like drawing but prefer more step-by-step instruction. Some love imaginative drawing and feel daunted when asked to draw something realistically. Discussing drawing as a skill with techniques that can be taught is a great starting point to this activity.

The rules for a blind contour drawing are:

1. Do not lift your pencil off the page.
2. Draw slowly and try to record every small detail. Depending on the students, 30 seconds may be a good time to start with.
3. Look at the object you are studying, not the drawing on the page.

Students' first few attempts are best done without them looking at their drawing at all until it is complete. Often their emotional responses or their memory's idea of what the object should look like interferes with the observational drawing process. A blind contour drawing is a good technique to start with. The purpose of a **blind contour drawing** is to improve perception skills. Blind contour requires the drawer to study an object very carefully. In the primary classroom, establishing "rules" like a game. It moves the focus away from the drawing to understanding a technique.

This is quite a fun drawing technique. It eases the pressure and anxiety of producing a realistic drawing but helps students practise their observation skills. For special needs students, a Touch and Feel box is useful. It's just too hard for some students to keep their eyes closed and not peek!

Before students try a blind contour drawing, demonstrate setting up the workspace and drawing using the technique. Setting up a workspace requires taping down the edges of the drawing paper to the table. This is essential as while you are drawing you are not allowed to look at the paper. One hand is drawing while the other is holding the object away from the desk so that the paper cannot be viewed peripherally. While drawing, verbalise your thoughts and actions. Start with focusing on the edge of the object. Position your drawing tool on the paper and slowly, as your eyes follow the contour, draw a contour line at a matched speed on the paper. When you are drawing, students usually start smiling and giggling as your drawing evolves. At the end of drawing, review the drawing "rules" – Did I look at the paper? Did I take my pencil off the paper? Did I draw in one continuous line? Did I continually focus on the object I was drawing?

Contour drawings are an important skill of observational drawing and perception. Contour drawing requires close, silent and intense observation of an object. The student should look at the object **and** their own drawing. Typically, a contour drawing is used to draw an outline of an object. The purpose of a contour drawing is to emphasise the mass and volume of a subject rather than the detail. Discuss with the students that there are many styles of contour drawing. For this activity it is used to build up to an observational drawing, to aid concentration and focus on the object.

The rules for a contour drawing are:

1. Do not lift your pencil off the page.
2. Draw slowly and try to record every small detail.
3. Look at the object you are studying and your drawing on the page.

Observational detailed drawings are what is often referred to by students as a normal drawing. There are no rules regarding lifting your pencil off the page or looking at the paper. But don't forget the importance of observation and drawing detail. According to the abilities of your students, talk about some of these things: lines, colours, shapes and textures seen in the subject; repetition, balance and contrast of the lines, colours, shapes, textures, proportion within an object; how the subject may be feeling or how it makes students feel; how the appearance of a subject changes when looked at from a higher or lower viewpoint and from a different angle; the foreground, middleground and background planes in a picture. Encourage students to handle the object if possible and to decide on their own focus, e.g., which viewpoint would be best and which aspects would be best emphasised.

Time

For this documented project, Year 3 students required two 50-minute lessons to create a series of drawings using blind contour, contour and observed drawings.