



Youth Education Program of San Francisco Botanical Garden Society

Sketching with Young Children

Most young children take naturally to drawing, and it is seen by adults and children alike as an age-appropriate activity. However, young children are often limited in dexterity and hand/eye coordination, and as they “learn to draw” the images they produce often have a stereotypic nature, with houses portrayed as boxes with triangular roofs, trees shaped like lollipops, and rainbows or robots appearing in every setting.

“Science sketching,” as distinguished from simple drawing, is a useful tool to develop young children’s powers of observation and concentration. Just like any other skill, sketching can be taught and the skill developed with practice.

Science Sketching vs. Making Pretty Pictures

Tell your students that the sketching they will do is of real things that they see around them. When we do science sketching, we only draw what we really see in front of us. If we see a red flower, we draw a red flower. If we see a round leaf, we draw a round leaf. When we are making pretty pictures, we might draw a rainbow or a butterfly or a robot just because we like it, even if it’s not really there. But that’s not sketching like a scientist.

Before We Sketch, We Look

The goal of science sketching is to look carefully and to record information so we can remember it later. So before we draw, we look carefully and ask:

What shapes do we see? Circles, ovals, triangles, squares?

What lines do we see? Curvy, pointy, straight?

How many do we see? Shapes, petals, legs, spots, leaves?

What patterns do we see? Stripes, spots, zig zags?

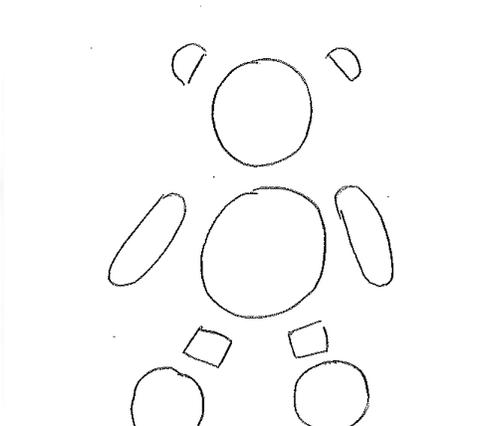
Simple Sketching Rubric

Just remember your ABC’s! Children should learn to make sketches that are:

- Accurate
- Big
- Colorful
- Detailed
- Explained

Sketching as a Group

When working with young children, it can be helpful to begin by sketching as a group. Use a whiteboard or easel paper to show children how complex objects are composed of simple shapes. Start by reviewing basic shapes – circles, ovals, lines, squares, triangles, rectangles – and drawing them so all children can see. Then display an object for all to see, preferably one with a fairly simple structure. Ask them to describe the shapes they can see and record them. Then use those shapes to assemble a simple drawing. Be sure to count parts and look for patterns too!



4 × ○

2 × ◐

2 × ◻

2 × ○

What is a “Good” Sketch?

A good sketch records details that a child has noticed after careful observation. With young children you may not be able to recognize what they drew, so ask! What matters is not how “pretty” the picture is, but how accurate in recording information.

Good feedback for children: “I like the way you drew that part of the leaf/the way you noticed those little spots/how you showed the pattern on the stem”

Not so great feedback: “Wow, that’s a pretty butterfly!...oops, you mean it’s not a butterfly?”

And Remember...

Sketching is a skill that anyone can develop with practice, and as a teacher of young children you should not be limited by concerns about your own abilities. Learning to sketch right along with the children is a great way to model the importance of practice!