

# Art all year: Simple painting projects for every season

*Winter, spring, summer, or fall—all you have to do is paint!*



Painting is intrinsically motivating to young children. The interaction of large and small motor skills with different sized brushes and various colors of paint are not only developmentally appropriate but also can enhance learning across the curriculum.

The bold colors of tempera paint and the contrast on white paper are especially satisfying to young learners. Additionally, the painting process can be transformed using natural resources. Children can find a natural object and use it in place of a paintbrush. Grass and pine straw, for example, may be tied to the end of a twig to make a brush, and flowers with stems can be repurposed as a brush.

Children may experiment making marks or stamping on paper with various natural tools such as leaves and acorn tops.

Challenging your children to find their unique brushes gives them direction for creative thinking and problem solving on an outdoor nature hunt.

## Getting started

Before each of the activities described below, use quality children's literature or informative Internet resources (see below), to explore the science behind nature and the seasons. If geographic locale permits, take a walk outdoors to observe examples in the natural environment. Examine actual objects as well as photographs and realistic pictures, found in books, magazines, and websites.

## Sensational snow scenes

Begin by exploring the children's books and stories of Snowflake Bentley, whose life passion was to study and photograph snow crystals. Falling snow is a magical occurrence to children. They can simulate the experience using this simple homemade paint that is non-toxic, inexpensive, and quick drying. The salt creates a grainy texture, which does not work well

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for painting with a brush but is ideal for squeezing from a bottle to mimic snowflakes falling. Plus, it results in a puffy, sparkly texture further resembling actual snow.

**Here's what you need:**

- flour
- salt
- large bowl of water and spoon for mixing
- small plastic squeeze bottles
- blue construction paper

1. Make the paint by mixing equal parts of flour, salt, and water. One cup of each ingredient makes enough paint to fill 6 2-ounce bottles.
2. Invite children to squeeze paint from the bottle onto construction paper to create abstract snow scenes.
3. Alternatively, encourage

children to draw landscapes on manila paper using crayons. Drop paint over pictures to produce a snow-covered effect.

**Beautiful butterflies**

A Norwegian nature photographer, Kjell Bloch Sandved, devoted his career to photographing a collection of butterfly and moth images with patterns on their wings that resemble letters of the alphabet. As a result, he created the *Butterfly Alphabet*. An Internet search, "butterfly alphabet," will reveal the striking posters and a book you may want to share with children as inspiration for seeing things as artists, more deeply looking at, imagining, and representing objects. Educators know the lifecycle of a butterfly is a popular springtime theme of study in early childhood classrooms. As

integration with the art of butterfly wings, this art activity develops fine motor skills and introduces the principle of *symmetry*.

**Here's what you need:**

- white copy paper
- plastic, eyedroppers
- washable liquid tempera paint, in several bright colors
- small plastic cups to hold paint
- pencils
- scissors

1. Introduce the activity by describing *symmetry* (the quality of having matching parts on either side of an *axis*). Encourage conversation and investigation of the two sides of a face, a leaf folded in half at the stem, and two matching shoes held sole to sole, for example.
2. Invite children to fold a sheet of paper in half and to draw butterfly wings as if the body were on the folded edge (the axis). Provide scissors for children to cut along their drawn lines.
3. Show children that when they open the paper, they will see a butterfly shape with a fold in the middle.
4. Introduce the eyedroppers and paint. Children unfamiliar with eyedroppers may want to practice the squeeze-and-release motion over a pan of water.
5. Invite children to use the eyedropper to squeeze small amounts of different colored paints onto one side of the open butterfly-shaped paper.
6. Show how to fold the paper and press the sides together. When children open the paper again, they reveal a perfectly matched, symmetrical set of butterfly wings.

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## Fantastic fish prints

Fishing is favorite summer pas-time that can be explored in the classroom through *Gyotaku*, a Japanese word that means “print fish.” Fish printing began more than 100 years ago as a practical way to record the size of a caught fish and has since evolved into an art form. Creating prints using either real fish or rubber fish replicas can produce impressive art. Erica Dodge has created an informative TED-ed video to provide teachers and children with a 3-minute overview of this traditional Japanese art.

### Here’s what you need:

- newsprint
- washable liquid tempera paint
- paintbrushes
- newspaper for protecting the table

- Styrofoam egg cartons or other small paint receptacles
- paper towels
- real local fish specimens or rubber fish replicas from an art supply company

**Note:** While using a real fish provides an example of authentic *Gyotaku*, real fish should be washed thoroughly before using to remove any slime or bodily fluids that might excrete when pressed. Require children to wear disposable nitrile or latex gloves and to wash their hands with soap and water after completing their prints.

1. Cover the table or work surface with newspaper. Place the fish directly on the center of the paper. Talk with children about the features, such as eyes,

mouth, gills, fins, and scales.

2. Invite children to completely cover the fish with a thin layer of tempera paint, using soft strokes.
3. Place newsprint paper over the fish and gently rub to press the paper over all the painted area before lifting the paper to reveal the print. A fish can be printed several times before reapplying paint, and each print will vary slightly. A second printing often results in a clearer depiction of actual texture.
4. Compare the fish prints with the actual fish. Encourage children to notice lines, curves, and blended paint colors.

## Fabulous fall foliage

In many parts of the United States, formerly green leaves turn to brilliant shades of yellow, orange, red, and brown every autumn. Young artists can portray this natural wonder using rich, warm colors and a variety of found objects. Prior to, or in addition to, the printing activity described, take a nature walk with the group. Collect leaves and other materials. Such collections in places like Japan are separated by hue, arranged into compositions, and photographed. Known as *ochiba* art, or fallen leaf art, this activity “reimagines the environment in a whimsical way.” See Internet link below.

### Here’s what you need:

- items for printing (such as spoons, blocks, bottle tops, pieces of plastic pipe, corks, and forks)
- manila paper, cut into leaf shapes
- warm earth-colored tempera paints (yellows, oranges, browns, and orange-reds)

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- shallow trays, such as Styrofoam meat trays

1. Invite children to help gather items for printing. Help them discover what might make a clear print and which objects have too many curves, sides, or features to be useful for the activity.
2. Invite children to dip the item into paint and gently press onto paper.
3. Allow the prints to dry thoroughly.

### Internet resources

Use these resources to develop more painting activities. Be careful to follow children’s interests and keep activities developmentally appropriate. Show videos only after you preview them, and always try to provide concrete,

hands-on examples and materials.

**How snow is formed**, <https://youtu.be/Fe4-crzqCvg?list=PLkCvMCLaI9l4GE3RshXxBhTYc7K-Hx90xD>

**The snowflake man (a short film about Snowflake Bentley)**, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptLmA263h1k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptLmA263h1k)

**Alphabet letters on butterfly wing patterns**, <https://mymodernmet.com/kjell-bloch-sandved-butterfly-alphabet/>

**Symmetry in nature—Animation**, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN0JT3ioI7A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN0JT3ioI7A)

**Gyotaku: The ancient Japanese art of printing fish - K. Erica Dodge**, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=k\\_mG-Ka4mv8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_mG-Ka4mv8)

**Rubber fish replica for printing, NASCO**, [www.enasco.com/p/Fish-Replica-Rubber-](http://www.enasco.com/p/Fish-Replica-Rubber-)

[Stamp-for-Printmaking%2B9711405?searchText=gyotaku](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Stamp-for-Printmaking%2B9711405?searchText=gyotaku)

**Gyotaku fish printing replicas, Dick Blick**, [www.dickblick.com/zz429/07/products.asp?param=0&ig\\_id=3590](http://www.dickblick.com/zz429/07/products.asp?param=0&ig_id=3590)

**People in Japan turn vibrant foliage into “fallen leaf art,”** <https://mymodernmet.com/fallen-leaf-art/>

**Watch this leaf change color**, [www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2&v=V5ipbamHZyY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=V5ipbamHZyY)

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