

Natural Objects and Ink; Drawing Nature with Nature for The Big Picture Project
By Catherine Schechter

Introduction:

I first saw ink drawings created using natural materials such as twigs in a lesson developed by Gordon Smith for Secondary students in an Artists For Kids enrichment program. The method is adaptable to any age of artist, from 6 to 60 and beyond. My lesson can be conducted in the classroom or outdoors. It particularly addresses the Big Ideas of exploration and purposeful choice and the Learning Standards of using line, shape, and texture. It can also be extended with the addition of ink wash or water colour on site or in the classroom. I will describe only the ink drawing method here. Many other excellent lesson ideas have been included by Sandrine Pelissier on **The Big Picture Project** website: <http://thebigpictureproject.com/how-to-participate/>

If you photograph and submit the student work to The Big Picture Project, students will also write artists' statements describing their personal connections to Vancouver and what their work means to them. This addresses the Language Arts Big Idea of "Stories help us learn about ourselves...and our communities" and the related Learning Standard of "Create...texts to deepen awareness of self...and community".

Materials:

Paint shirts, paper towel, 2 buckets or pails, drawing boards, masking tape, surgical gloves for adult who handles ink and jars

Water colour paper (if planning to use wash in the work) or Accent Vellum or other **card stock paper** cut to desired size. Opus Artist Supplies is an excellent source. **Images submitted to The Big Picture Project must be square.**

India ink: partly fill small lidded jars, 1 per 2 students. Have a tuna can to set each jar in.

Natural objects: pencil-length stiff twigs, bunched fine twigs, pine cones, and other natural materials

Preparation:

Collect natural object drawing tools ahead of time if they are not available at the site where you will conduct the lesson.

If working indoors, protect desks, and select a large landscape painting reproduction or landscape photo as your image source.

Otherwise, students write names on back of drawing paper, affix about 6 tape rings, and press paper lightly onto drawing boards, blank side up. Put ink jars in tins, in a portable flat-bottomed container, with latex gloves. Have 2 buckets, one half-full of water, one holding paper towel.

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Vocabulary:

You may use some of these terms: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, straight, curved, landscape, viewfinder, panorama, close-up, detail, background, horizon, middle ground, foreground, landscape or portrait orientation, medium, India ink, contrast, line, contour, shape.

Method:

Introduction: about 10 minutes

Distribute paint shirts. Explain that students will be drawing using natural tools and **ink**, as well as **wash or water colour** if you will be adding them. Show any finished examples. Explain that ink will stain clothing but wash off skin completely after a few days. Students stay cleanest if an adult delivers and takes away all ink jars. Go over behavioural expectations. Each student carries own board; volunteers may help carry other materials.

On site: ink drawing with twigs and other natural objects, about 45 minutes – 1 hour

Orientation: 5 – 10 minutes

Point out the boundaries for students working at the site. Have the students collect drawing tools on site or have them pre-organized. Students sit or stand close to you. Show **portrait** (longest dimension vertical) and **landscape** orientation (longest dimension horizontal). Students may choose either. Demonstrate making a **viewfinder**, bringing a thumb and pointer finger L of each hand together with one thumb up and one down. Have students look at the landscape through their viewfinders. They may choose to draw a **panorama** or **select** one part for a **close-up**.

Demonstration: 10 minutes

Sit sideways to the landscape with your drawing facing the students. Dip a twig into an ink jar or a lid with ink in it, and draw the main **contours** of the landscape. **Lines** representing mountains, horizon, trees, or other features extending beyond the frame of the drawing should touch the edges of the paper. Add **details** using twigs and other objects: **patterns** of fine, thick, jagged, or smooth lines, hatch marks, dots, or scribbles. Look at the landscape as you work quickly, glancing at the paper every second or two.

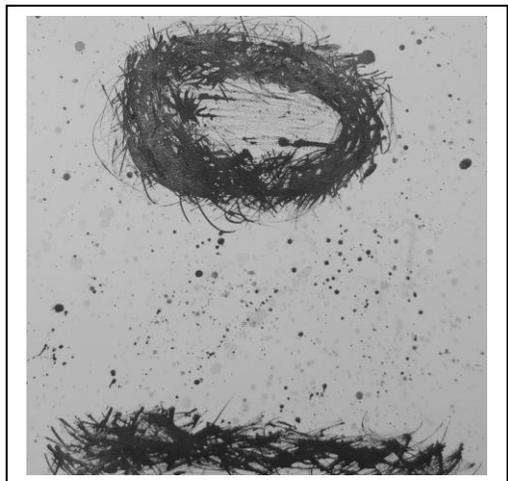
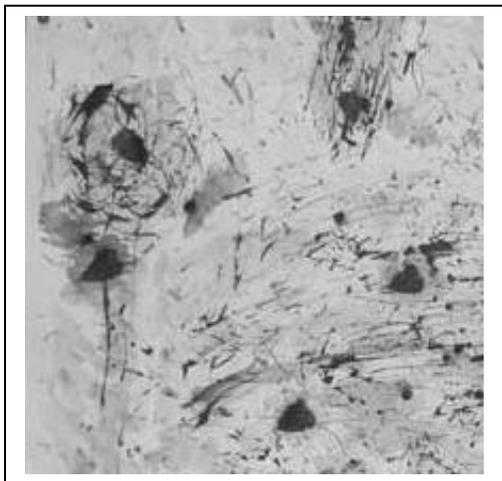
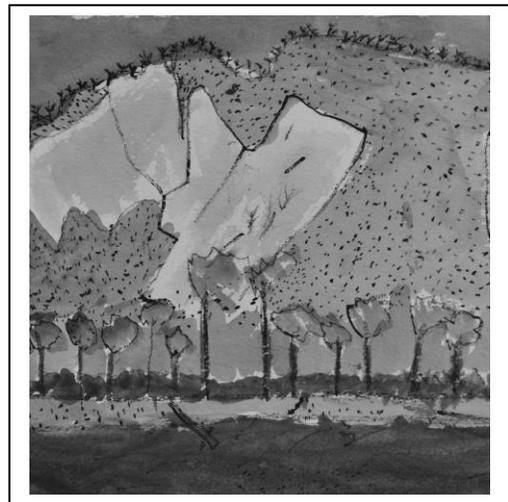
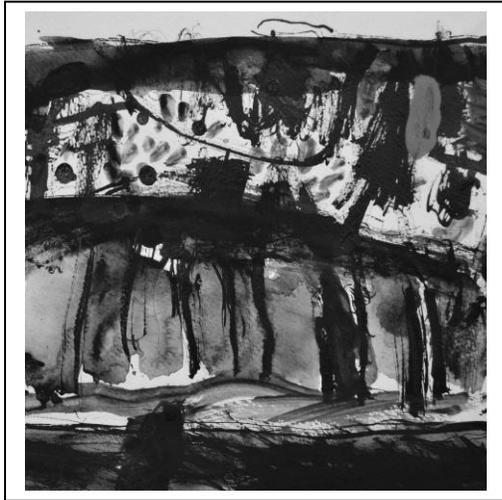
Student Art Making: 30 – 45 minutes

Students select their spots to sit in pairs or small groups. The teacher hands out ink and they begin drawing with their tools. During this time, if planning to add water colour, set up paint trays and water containers. Circulate and encourage students in their work, reminding them to extend their landscapes to the edges of the paper and to add **details** once they have established

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the main **contours** of the **landscape**. Encourage them to **experiment** with their tools. Add names in ink to the drawings. Use the water bucket for hand-washing and the empty bucket for used paper towel.

Early finishers may create small detailed pencil drawings in pre-made folded paper booklets, or create small structures from stacked stones or small twigs as they wait. If you wish to add wash or water colour when all drawings are complete, you may do so in the same session or return later. You begin with a demonstration, hand out materials, and the students begin. Adding water colour often takes less than 30 minutes, and ink wash less than 10 minutes. If you use colour, submit the photos in black and white to **The Big Picture Project**.



Twig and ink drawings with wash by students in Grades 3 – 6

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