

Appreciating the Visual Beauty of Preserves: Collage of Color



Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

Colorful individual and collaborative collage projects appreciating the history and necessity of preserving garden vegetables will be created. This colorful bounty can be put on display. Discussion between participants, staff, and family members will be encouraged. Pickles and jams will be available as snacks to help foster discussion and a community environment. These foods, through their taste and smell, are also to be used to trigger food memories and/or imaginings.

TIME:

Two or more hours over two sessions (depending on the number of participants).

MATERIALS:

- White glue
- Sponge brushes or paintbrushes
- Small cups for water and glue
- Markers or paint and brushes (optional)
- Thick card stock, 8" x 10" or larger, at least 2-3 sheets per participant
- Tissue and crepe paper in a variety of colors
- Other collage paper (optional)
- Stiff Mason-jar templates in the shapes of different jars, such as wide-mouth or jelly jars, ranging in size from 7" to 9" tall (an artist or someone else should make these on heavy stock paper or

cardboard in advance of the activity)

- Scissors (spring-loaded scissors might be helpful to someone who has grasping issues but not motor skill issues)
- One large surface for the overall collaborative piece (wood or poster board; the finished size will depend upon the number of participants. A board that is 24" x 30" will fit at least nine jar collages. The instructor could choose a larger or smaller surface to accommodate more or less participants.)
- Jars of pickles and jams (for visual inspiration, as well as to smell and taste to trigger memory, imagination, and physiologic responses. Homemade is best!)
- Pickling spices (These are optional, and are to be used for visual inspiration, as well as to smell to trigger memory and imagination. For example: peppers, garlic, peppercorns, cinnamon, dill.)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

Many people have positive memories surrounding the preservation of food. If they have not personally canned and pickled food, they likely have a relative who preserved summer’s bounty for their family to later enjoy. This activity is designed to encourage conversations around those shared common memories, culminating in a final collaborative project. This sense of community will address the issues of both loneliness and boredom. Even if certain participants do not want to create their own pieces of art, they will be encouraged to eat some pickles and share their own stories. However, the freestyle collaging and painting techniques will enable even the most reserved person to create his or her own piece of artwork to add to the collaborative collage. The tearing of paper in the creation of the artwork de-emphasizes the need for fine motor skills, allowing those people with such issues a more fulfilling and successful experience, which works to address a sense of helplessness. There is no emphasis on realistic drawing or painting, only on bright colors that evoke fond and delicious memories or creative imagination. This encouragement of imagination, personal choice, the focus on bright colors, and a de-emphasis on realism all help to address feelings of both helplessness and hopelessness.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDY:

Chelsea and Westminster Hospital conducted a study to compare the use and nonuse of art intervention in three different hospital units. Groups who received art intervention were more likely to have significantly improved clinical outcomes. These were not limited to but included better vitals, diminished stress-related cortisol, and a reduced need for medication to induce sleep. These benefits seemed to come from feelings of exploration, expression, and release.

*--Staricoff, R.L. “Arts in Health: The Value of Evaluation.”
Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health 126,
no. 3 (2006): 116-120.*

Cautionary Note: Consult with medical staff and participants with regard to allergies or other such adverse effects associated with smell and taste activities. Perhaps enlist the help of medical staff with this activity plan.

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

I. Arrange participants in small groups around work tables; perhaps five participants per table. Have at least one volunteer, care facility activity coordinator, or artist at each table, if possible, to help direct activities with the participants. Groupings of participants should be arranged in a way to encourage discussion and sharing. There should be a variety of canned or jarred foods to look at for visual inspiration, as well as some on plates for snacking and to trigger food memories or imaginings. Many studies indicate the potent role that smell plays in triggering physiologic responses and the recall of memories. Thus, having jars of pickles, jellies, and jams on the table should be used in an effort to trigger more active responses in the discussion to follow. Encourage participants to taste the samples and compare them to the preserved foods from their own memories or personal tastes. **(It is important, however, to talk first with the care facility medical staff to be aware of any allergies on the part of the participants.)**

Be sure to have fun with this part of the activity. Hide the jars from sight, at first, and ask individual participants to close their eyes. Hold a jar of canned food, whether it is of pickled cucumbers, beets, or watermelon rinds, under their noses and ask them to smell it. Keeping their eyes closed, ask the participants to describe what they smell. What might some of the ingredients be? Ask them to explain what is going through their mind at that moment—any images, memories, or if they experience any sensations like salivation. Ask

them to guess what it is they are smelling, without opening their eyes.

Then, to further break the ice and begin the conversation, read the folklore beliefs about plants and planting on pages 153 and 156 of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Ask the participants if they or someone they know or knew ever grew a garden. Ask them what they grew, when they planted, and if there was anything special they did to make sure their garden produced a bountiful harvest. The person directing this plan should share what he or she knows, so that it becomes a conversation.

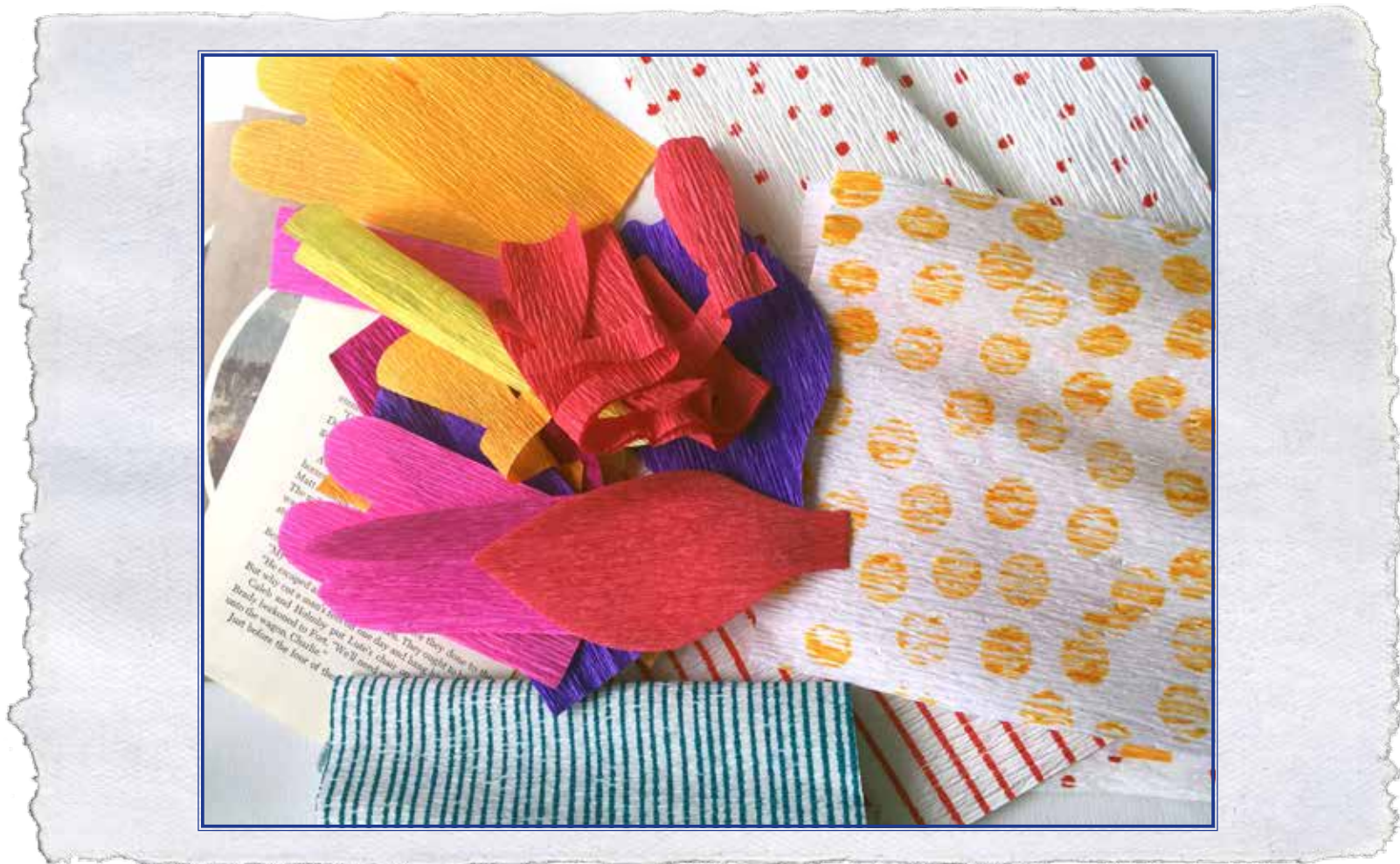
Expand the conversation by reading “Saskatoon Berries” from page 277 and “A Little Here and a Little There” (also show the pictures) from page 285 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Have a discussion about gathering berries and other wild foods from nature. What did people gather and pick—asparagus, mushrooms, chokecherries, wild plums? Where were they found? When is the best time to gather them? How were they prepared to eat?

Finally, begin with a discussion about food preservation, asking if anyone cans or has ever canned food. Does anyone have a friend or family member who cans or has canned food? When and what do they can? What kinds of vegetables, berries, and meats are canned? What kinds of jams and jellies were made? Who taught them these food preservation methods? Did they write their recipes

down or did they make them from memory? Are there any tips or tricks?

2. Pass out one piece of card stock per participant, and a variety of colored tissue and crepe paper. Discuss what the colors remind them of: Peppers? Cucumbers? Garlic? Peppercorns? Dill? (The actual spices could be made available to smell and to see. The same game

could be played as previously with the jars of pickles, jellies, and jams. It is important, however, to talk first with the care facility medical staff to be aware of any allergies on the part of the participants.) Talk about how each of these ingredients might be prepared—sliced, chopped, tossed in a brine, and so on. Then begin to rip the colored paper into a variety of sizes and shapes.



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3. Remind participants that pickles wouldn't be perfectly arranged in a jar. They just would be tossed in! Begin to arrange the ripped pieces of paper on the card stock and brush the card stock with a small amount of watered-down glue to hold the paper pieces in place. Encourage overlapping and layering, as well as a variety of shapes and colors. Keep in mind that realism is not the goal. The colors and energy of big shapes are far more important.

4. While the collages dry, discuss the different types of jars used in canning. Distribute the jar templates made by the person directing this plan. Identify each shape and what it might be used for. For example, what shape and size of jar likely would be used for jam versus one for pickled cucumbers? Look at the examples on the table and ask how else they are different. Do some have different patterns on the glass? Were some made with different preserving methods, requiring different containers, like quick pickles versus those made with a hot-water bath?



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5. Have the participants trace the Mason-jar template of their choice onto the back of their collages, afterwards cutting out the shapes. If scissors are an issue for certain participants, volunteers or the person leading the activity can help them by cutting the paper after they have outlined it, though spring-loaded scissors might be beneficial to

someone who has grasping issues but not motor skill issues. This is at the activity director's discretion, as cutting is not at the core of the project. Alternatively, the participant could trace the Mason jar onto the front of the collage, then paint the black or brown "shelf" around the outside, leaving the colorful jar intact in the center.



6. If desired, participants could use markers or paint to make colorful shapes and designs on the face of the collage to further insinuate the

canned or pickled food. Again, keep in mind that realism is not the goal. The colors and energy of big shapes are far more important.



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SESSION 2 (1 HOUR):

- 1.** The second session should begin by recapping the first session. Discuss the art jars that were made, as well as the stories that were remembered, imagined, or shared. Explain that the participants now will build upon what was made in the first session to create a larger, collaborative art piece: a bountiful “pantry” of preserved foods.
- 2.** If any jars have not been finished from the first session, they can now be completed. Additionally, if anyone would like to complete another jar to keep (or for the final collaborative project), they may go ahead and do so (so long as there is enough time).
- 3.** As the jars are finished, have the group begin to arrange them flat on a table or on top of the final surface, whether you have chosen poster board or some other canvas to adhere the collages to. Discussion about how to arrange the collaborative “pantry” is strongly encouraged. If a large magnetic board or corkboard is available, this also could be a useful tool to encourage participation in how to arrange the final pieces, taking care to only use push pins on the outside of the art and to not actually pierce the paper. It could be helpful to arrange the pieces on a vertical surface for everyone to see before the final order is chosen and the pieces are secured to the board.
- 4.** Once a decision on the arrangement of the pantry has been made, secure the jars in place with glue and discuss the well-stocked pantry. How long would it last? What foods would you eat first? Would there be anything special you might use one specific jar for? Finish by sharing more stories and snacks.



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AUTHOR • NICOLE GAGNER:

Nicole is an artist who lives and works in Bismarck, North Dakota. Nicole's career in art instruction began immediately after college with VSAND, an organization that brings art classes to groups of individuals of all ages with physical and intellectual disabilities. She then moved to California and began working with Options Family of Services, where she continued to work in group homes and day programs for the intellectually disabled and traumatic brain injury community. Her work teaching art to students with a range of physical and cognitive disabilities solidified her idea that any person of any age can be an artist, if given the appropriate tools, opportunity, and encouragement. That concept always has been at the center of Nicole's personal artistic mission. Nicole brought chunky, adaptive tools, such as large-handled paintbrushes or a mahl stick to steady a shaky hand, into her classroom. The use of forgiving mediums, like pastels, acrylics, or water-mixable oils, are another one of the many ways that Nicole has helped her students unleash their inner artist, regardless of their ability levels. Engagement in the arts provides lifelong enrichment and can begin at any time.

All artwork and photography by Nicole Gagner.

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