

Nature-Based Learning

Arts Ideas Guide: Preschool - Grade 2



What can I do outside today?



What Can I Do Outside Today?

Introduction

From our earliest years, the arts help us interact with the world, express ideas and emotions, and learn about ourselves and others. This guide is designed to help educators explore ways to bring standards-aligned, nature-based arts education into preschool through second grade. It builds on the *Nature-Based Learning Ideas Guide Birth to Pre-K* and aligns with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs). This guide is a starting point for outdoor arts-based learning, and educators are encouraged to adapt and expand these ideas to reflect their students' interests and deepen understanding. While the focus is on art, many of the activities also support other areas of learning.

Lifelong learning begins with play, and outdoor play is a powerful, research-backed practice for all learning environments, including kindergarten and beyond. Play engages children in exploration, imagination, and inquiry, helping them build cognitive and social-emotional skills along with the confidence to try new experiences. Outdoor play also provides important physical activity and helps children refine both large and small motor skills. At the same time, opportunities for engaging with the arts are everywhere, through creative movement, noticing shapes and colors, imaginary play with props, or making rhythms with found objects.

Educators play a key role by creating open-ended experiences that inspire original expression, artistic exploration, vocabulary development, teamwork, and student-centered conversations. Through nature-based arts experiences, children strengthen their creativity, connect more deeply with one another, and build appreciation for the natural world.

Outdoor education

Education that occurs mostly in the outdoors and is focused on engagement with the outdoor environment

Nature-based education

Nature as the central organizing feature of the curriculum and a focus is made on children forming a connection with the natural world and how the natural world supports children's development. It can be conducted indoors or outdoors

“Outdoor learning continues to be very important to our Riverside community. I hope educators everywhere see the importance. Students love the magic of playing among the trees, learning about the outdoors, and redefining a ‘classroom.’”

~ Riverside Elementary

Nature-Based Learning Ideas Guide

Birth to Pre-K

About this guide

This guide gives learners opportunities to explore many forms of artistic expression. Our goal is to help preschool through second grade teachers connect outdoor activities, many they may already be doing, with grade-level arts benchmarks.

[Minnesota's K-12 Arts Standards](#) include benchmarks for five areas of the arts: dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts. Each of these areas offers rich opportunities to connect with outdoor and nature-based learning.

In this guide, you'll find sample alignments between the ECIPs, the Arts Anchor Standards, and benchmarks from dance, music, theater, and visual arts for activities in the *Outdoor Ideas Guide*. While not all of the included activities are arts specific, they do help students build basic skills that the arts can build on in later years. The Arts Anchor Standards describe big-picture learning goals for all five arts areas across K-12. Each anchor standard connects to multiple benchmarks, which means teachers have flexibility in how they align outdoor activities to K-2 benchmarks depending on the lesson focus.

Sample benchmarks are included as starting points, chosen for their most direct connection to the activities. Many activities can connect to additional benchmarks, and we encourage educators to build outdoor experiences that extend and expand learning across the arts standards. Teachers are also encouraged to collaborate in identifying other nature-based activities that meet K-2 arts benchmarks along with benchmarks in other subject areas.

More information and resources to support implementation can be found on the [Minnesota Department of Education \(MDE\) Arts Standards Implementation webpage](#). For additional tips on early arts learning, see the article [Child-Directed Art Exploration in Preschool](#).

Find More Outdoor and Nature Learning Resources:

- [Minnesota Department of Education, Early Education Outdoor Learning](#)
- [Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Early Childhood Outdoor Learning](#)

Happy exploring!

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Dance Activities



ACTIVITIES:

- Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, jump to the cone, run to a pole
- Parachute with songs
- Hopscotch
- Obstacle Course

ECIPS

- A2: Understanding Patterns
- AL3: Focused Attention
- AL9: Managing Attention
- P4: Locomotion

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.
5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for performance.

Dance Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Demonstrate different locomotor and non-locomotor movements. (1.0.2.2.2)
- Move safely in space to cues. (1.0.3.5.2)

Dance 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Connect a series of locomotor and non-locomotor movements. (1.1.2.2.2)
- Move safely in space through a range of activities, alone and with a partner. (1.1.3.5.2)

Dance 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Combine a variety of movements while changing the elements of dance. (1.2.2.2.2)
- Move safely in a variety of spatial relationships and formations, alone and with a partner. (1.2.3.5.2)





Dance Activities

ACTIVITY: Yoga Poses

ECIPS

- AL3: Focused Attention
- P4: Locomotion
- SE4: Regulating Emotions and Behaviors

Anchor Standards

5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for performance.

Dance Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Demonstrate a range of body shapes. (1.0.3.5.1)

Dance 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Demonstrate a range of actions that move in and through space. (1.1.3.5.1)

Dance 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Demonstrate a range of actions and movement sequences in and through space. (1.2.3.5.1)

ACTIVITY: Red Light, Green Light

ECIPS

- AL3: Focused Attention
- AL9: Managing Attention
- P4: Locomotion

Anchor Standards

3. Create original artistic work.

Dance Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Improvise movement that starts and stops on cue. (1.0.2.3.1)

Dance 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Improvise movement that has a beginning, middle and end. (1.1.2.3.1)

Dance 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Improvise movement within a simple dance structure and identify the structure. (1.2.2.3.1)



Music Activities



ACTIVITIES:

- Make homemade instruments out of toilet tubes, kleenex boxes and play them
- Bring class instruments outside on a blanket

ECIPS

- A1: Understanding Differences
- A2: Understanding Patterns
- A3: Artistic Choice Making
- A4: Self Expression
- AL7: Originality
- P6: Dexterity

Anchor Standards

3. Create original artistic work.
5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for performance.
6. Make artistic choices in order to convey meaning through performance.

Music Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Choose a musical sound to share. (3.0.2.3.1)
- Demonstrate moving, singing, and playing instruments with others. (3.0.3.5.1)
- Make a musical choice while singing, playing instruments, or moving to explore the effects of musical elements. (3.0.3.6.1)
- For example: High/low; loud/soft; fast/slow. (3.0.3.6.1)

Music 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Choose musical ideas to share using a limited set of rhythms or pitches. (3.1.2.3.1)
- Demonstrate moving, singing, and playing instruments with others, and alone. (3.1.3.5.1)
- Follow the teacher to start, stop and stay together throughout an established musical form. (3.1.3.6.1)

Music 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Preserve personal rhythmic or melodic patterns using a system of notation or recording technology. (3.2.2.3.1)
- Develop vocal and instrumental skills to perform a variety of music. (3.2.3.5.1)
- Perform music with and for others, using technical accuracy and expression. (3.2.3.6.1)





Music Activities

ACTIVITY: Parachute with songs

ECIPS

- AL3: Focused Attention
- A2: Understanding Patterns

Anchor Standards

6. Make artistic choices in order to convey meaning through performance.

Music Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Make a musical choice while singing, playing instruments, or moving to explore the effects of musical elements. (3.0.3.6.1)

Music 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Follow the teacher to start, stop and stay together throughout an established musical form. (3.1.3.6.1)

Music 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Perform music with and for others, using technical accuracy and expression. (3.2.3.6.1)

ACTIVITIES:

- Use leaves and sticks as “bean bags” and “rhythm sticks”
- Create a music wall with old pots and pans and wooden spoons

ECIPS

- A1: Understanding Differences
- A2: Understanding Patterns
- AL3: Focused Attention
- P6: Dexterity

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.

Music Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Improvise musical sounds in response to teacher cues. (3.0.2.2.1)

Music 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Generate musical ideas using a limited set of rhythms or pitches. (3.1.2.2.1)

Music 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Generate rhythmic or melodic patterns. (3.2.2.2.1)



Theater Activities

ACTIVITY: Act out a story as a class

ECIPS

- AL5: Creative Play
- AL9: Managing Attention
- LLC8: Comprehension of Text (if acting out a story from a book)

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.
3. Create original artistic work.

Theater Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Invent and inhabit an imaginary place in dramatic play or a guided drama experience. (4.0.2.2.1)
- Interact with peers to contribute to a dramatic play or a guided drama experience. (4.0.2.3.1)

Theater 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Suggest character choices in a guided drama experience. (4.1.2.2.1)
- Contribute to the development of a sequential plot in a guided drama experience. (4.1.2.3.1)

Theater 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Develop new plot details for a guided drama experience. (4.2.2.2.1)
- Collaborate with peers to create dialogue for a guided drama experience. (4.2.2.3.1)

ACTIVITY: Bring pretend play props outside

ECIPS

- AL5: Creative Play
- AL6: Symbolic Play
- LLC2: Social Conversation

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.
8. Evaluate artistic work by applying criteria.

Theater Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Create props, puppets, or costume pieces for dramatic play. (4.0.2.2.2)
- Identify props and costumes used in a guided drama experience. (4.0.4.8.1)

Theater 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Collaborate with peers to suggest costumes and props for a guided drama experience. (4.1.2.2.2)
- Describe the props and costumes used in a guided drama experience. (4.1.4.8.1)

Theater 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Collaborate with peers to develop settings for a guided drama experience. (4.2.2.2.2)
- Describe how understanding of characters, settings, or events is influenced by a prop or costume in a guided drama experience. (4.2.4.8.1)





Theater Activities

ACTIVITY: Animal movements

ECIPS

- AL5: Creative Play
- P4: Locomotion

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.
5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for performance.

Theater Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Use movement to retell a story in a guided drama experience. (4.0.2.2.3)
- Use body, voice and imagination during a guided drama experience. (4.0.3.5.2)

Theater 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Identify ways gestures and movement may be used to create or retell a story. (4.1.2.2.3)
- Use body, voice and imagination to convey character traits and emotions in a guided drama experience. (4.1.3.5.2)

Theater 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Identify ways voice, sounds, and technology may be used to create or retell a story. (4.2.2.2.3)
- Demonstrate how movement, voice, and sounds (including available technology) are incorporated into a work. (4.2.3.5.2)

ACTIVITY: Bring plastic or wooden animals or figures outside on a table or blanket for pretend play

ECIPS

- AL5: Creative Play
- AL6: Symbolic Play
- LLC2: Social Conversation

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.
8. Evaluate artistic work by applying criteria.

Theater Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Create props, puppets, or costume pieces for dramatic play. (4.0.2.2.2)
- Identify props and costumes used in a guided drama experience. (4.0.4.8.1)

Theater 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Collaborate with peers to suggest costumes and props for a guided drama experience. (4.1.2.2.2)
- Describe the props and costumes used in a guided drama experience. (4.1.4.8.1)

Theater 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Collaborate with peers to develop settings for a guided drama experience. (4.2.2.2.2)
- Describe how understanding of characters, settings, or events is influenced by a prop or costume in a guided drama experience. (4.2.4.8.1)



Theater Activities



ACTIVITY: Tell a story together; teacher prompts with the beginning, students then add details

ECIPS

- **AL3: Focused Attention**
- **LLC3: Vocabulary and Sentence Structure**
- **LLC8: Comprehension of Text (if re-telling a story that has been read to them)**

Anchor Standards

3. Create original artistic work.

Theater Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Interact with peers to contribute to a dramatic play or a guided drama experience. (4.0.2.3.1)
- Express original ideas in dramatic play or a guided drama experience. (4.0.2.3.2)

Theater 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Contribute to the development of a sequential plot in a guided drama experience. (4.1.2.3.1)
- Participate and work with peers in a guided drama experience. (4.1.2.3.2)

Theater 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Collaborate with peers to create dialogue for a guided drama experience. (4.2.2.3.1)
- Contribute ideas and collaborate with a group to advance a story in a guided drama experience. (4.2.2.3.2)



Visual Arts Activities

ACTIVITIES:

- Clipboards, paper, and pencils for drawing and writing
- Paint or write with water and paintbrushes on the concrete
- Write or draw with chalk
- Paint, draw, or write on paper attached to easels brought outdoors or covering a large table/fence using sticks or other nature objects

ECIPS

- A3: Artistic Choice Making
- A4: Self Expression
- AL7: Originality
- LLC9: Writing Conventions
- P6: Dexterity

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.

Visual Arts Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Explore artistic ideas through intentional play. (5.0.2.2.2)

Visual Arts 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Use observation and investigation in preparation for making a work of art. (5.1.2.2.2)

Visual Arts 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Use various materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity. (5.2.2.2.2)



Visual Arts Activities

ACTIVITIES:

- Draw maps of the outdoor play space or other classroom spaces
- Place natural items on a tray and each child can create their own nature self-portrait in a frame with the items

ECIPS

- A4: Self Expression
- AL5: Creative Play
- AL8: Working Memory
- M12: Location, Spatial Relationships and Landmark Use
- P6: Dexterity
- Soc6: Physical Environment

Anchor Standards

3. Create original artistic work.

Visual Arts Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Create art that communicates an idea using artistic foundations. (5.0.2.3.1)

Visual Arts 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Identify and use symbols when creating art. (5.1.2.3.1)

Visual Arts 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Create art that represents natural and constructed environments. (5.2.2.3.1)

ACTIVITIES:

- Glue leaves and other natural materials on paper
- Paint on egg cartons or rocks
- Lie in the grass and ask the kids how they think the clouds are made and then have the kids draw the clouds in a journal or on paper on a clipboard

ECIPS

- AL2: Inquisitiveness
- A3: Artistic Choice Making
- P6: Dexterity

Anchor Standards

2. Generate and develop original artistic ideas.

Visual Arts Kindergarten Benchmarks

- Explore artistic ideas through intentional play. (5.0.2.2.2)

Visual Arts 1st Grade Benchmarks

- Use observation and investigation in preparation for making a work of art. (5.1.2.2.2)

Visual Arts 2nd Grade Benchmarks

- Use various materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity. (5.2.2.2.2)

