

LEARNING ACTIVITY:

Painting With Soil

Grade Levels: 6-10

Materials

- Dry soil
- Hammer or mallet
- Mortar and pestle
- Paper cups (4 oz.)
- Knee-high panty hose
- Pencils
- Ink pens
- Paint brushes
- Artist acrylic or Elmer's® glue
- Sponges and rags
- Water color paper
- Masking tape
- Microscope or magnifying glass



Source: Soil Science Society of America,
Adapted with permission.

Soils are one of our most important natural resources—just think of where all the food you eat comes from. They also are important for the beauty the many soil colors add to our landscapes.

Most of us overlook this natural beauty because we see it every day. Often these colors blend with vegetation, sky, water, etc. Soil colors serve as pigments in bricks, pottery, and artwork. The color and texture of soil painting is fascinating and a creative opportunity for all ages of students.

In this activity, the objective is to have fun and to gain a deeper appreciation of soils—one of our most important natural resources. The estimated time is about 1 or 2 hours.

Procedure

Prepare Your Soils

1. Gather several samples of soils of different colors and textures. If you cannot find these readily available in your area, you may search online for suppliers.
2. Air dry or oven dry on low heat.
3. Place some of the crushed soil into a mortar. Use a pestle to crush the soil into a fine powder. Repeat to crush all of the different colored soils.
4. (Extension: For each sample, keep a small amount—about 1 tablespoon—of uncrushed soil for students to examine under a microscope or magnifying glass.)
5. Place some of the powdered soil in a paper cup. Wrap a knee-high panty hose over the top. Turn cup upside down over a piece of paper and gently shake out finely powdered soil.
6. Place the different soils in paper cups—notice the colors and textures.



Create Your Artwork

1. Get inspired to create soils art by looking at soil art from around the world. Search online for examples.
2. Examine the colors and textures of the soils that your teacher provides to you. How could you use these characteristics to create your art?
3. Use a pencil to lightly sketch an outline of your artwork on water color paper. When you are satisfied with your composition trace your pencil lines with ink.
4. Pour a small amount of artist acrylic or glue into small paper cups. Add a small amount of finely powdered soil. You may also want to add a few drops of water to the soil mix. Experiment with depth of color and mixing the different soils.
5. Use different sizes and kinds of paint brushes, sponges, and rags. Experiment and have fun.
6. When your artwork is dry, you may want to apply another layer of soil paint. You may want to use a black ink pen to make finishing touches on your artwork.

www.soils4teachers.org

www.soils4kids.org

NGSS Connections

- Science and engineering practices—Asking questions and solving problems
- Crosscutting Concepts—Patterns
- Disciplinary Core Ideas—Earth's systems: Earth materials and systems