**A Booklet of Plant Studies**

**Essential Question** How can we use shape, line, value, color, and texture to study, compare, and draw different plants?

**Grade** 3rd

**Time** 50 minutes

**Art Concepts** Drawing, shading, shape, line, texture

**Materials** Pencil, eraser, paper, scissors, stapler or paper clip/binder clip, clipboard or other portable surface to draw on, colored pencils

**Artworks in Focus** [*Poppies and Bees*, 1906](https://collections.lacma.org/node/241576)by Paul de Longpré

[*Page from an Herbal Manuscript*, Iraq or Syria, 13th centur](https://collections.lacma.org/node/239656)y by Artist Unknown

[*Page from an Herbal Manuscript*, Iraq or Syria, 13th century](https://collections.lacma.org/node/239655)by Artist Unknown

**Talking about Art** Why do artists create **drawings** and sketches? For example, why might a painter do a sketch before making a painting? Artists create drawings for lots of different reasons: to express themselves, to plan out an idea, to record and explore what they see in the world around them. We are going to use drawing as a way to look closely and explore the nature that we see around us every day. First, let’s look at some examples of how different artists in LACMA’s collection have been inspired by nature.

French artist Paul de Longpré painted this watercolor called *Poppies and Bees*. Botany is the scientific study of plants, and De Longpré studied traditional botanical illustrations. What do you think a botanical illustration is? De Longpré created his paintings in a similar style to these illustrations. For example, he left the backgrounds blank so that the details of the plants stand out more on the page. Can you find the main parts of the poppy in his watercolor? Look for the stem, leaves, and flowers. What colors did the artist use? If you could touch the leaves, what do you think they would feel like? What do you see that makes you say that?

The poppy is the state flower of California and shares many characteristics with the rose, which De Longpré was better known for representing in his paintings. The large, voluminous petals and bright colors of both of these flowers appealed to the artist. Imagine that you are in the painting. What might you smell and feel in the air? The bees buzzing around the petals make me think of a warm summer’s day, with a gentle breeze spreading the smell of the flower, attracting our little friends.

Now let’s look at *Page from an Herbal Manuscript*. This page from a larger book was made in the thirteenth century in present-day Iraq or Syria. Can you spot the four main parts of the plant? What else do you notice? As you can see, the artist has represented all the main parts of the flower, even the roots! You can also see some writing toward the bottom of the picture. In the ninth century, Islamic scribes began translating, updating, and expanding ancient Greek manuscripts. Among the translated texts was a guide to medicinal plants, which was the inspiration for later herbal manuscript pages like this one. The drawings and paintings would often include written notes detailing the many fascinating characteristics and health benefits of each plant.

What **shapes** and colors did the artist use to create this representation of a flowering plant? How does this plant look similar to or different than plants you have seen in real life? Instead of representing this plant in the naturalistic and realistic way that Greek artists did, Islamic artists simplified it, capturing the shapes and **lines** that stand out the most, as well as making them more symmetrical. This was the style of Islamic design at the time. Notice the flat, bold colors and the exaggerated points of the leaves.

Take a look at another page from the same manuscript. What is similar or different about the shapes the artist used to represent this plant? The flowers look like circular forms with spikes all around them, and they are not as brightly colored, but like the other plant, we can see the roots and it is quite symmetrical.

**Making Art** Inspired by De Longpré’s watercolor and the illustrations in the pages of the Islamic herbal manuscript, we are going to make our own book of plant drawings:

1. Take a few sheets of 8½-by-11-inch white paper and use scissors to cut them evenly in half, like a hamburger. These will be the pages of our book.
2. Gather your materials and find a place outside your home that contains different types of plants. If you have indoor plants, you can draw those too. De Longpré liked to draw flowering plants with big bright petals. Start by choosing a plant with features that appeal to you.
3. We don’t have to draw the plant exactly how it looks in real life; instead, we can look at the shapes and lines of the stem, flowers, and leaves to create a representation. For example, look at the leaves of your plant, are they round or are they thin and pointed? Does your plant have just one long stem or are there several branches? After you have spent a few minutes looking closely, start adding the shapes and lines to your paper.
4. You can show how light is cast onto the plant by **shading** the parts of your drawing that look like they are in shadow and either leaving the paper white or shading lightly with your pencil where there is light.
5. Now let’s think about the **texture** of the plant and how we can represent it in our drawings. If the leaves and petals are soft, how can you use your pencil to represent that? What about if the leaves are smooth or spiky?
6. Finally, use colored pencils to add color to your drawing and write notes about any other characteristics of the plant. For example, does the plant smell? Does the smell remind you of anything? Do you know the name of the plant?
7. When you have collected several drawings of different plants, arrange them into an order that you like. For example, you could group all the plants with flowers together.
8. When you are happy with the arrangement of the pages, you can use a stapler or a paper clip to hold them together.

**Reflection** What was similar about the plants you drew, and what was different? Reflect on the textures, smells, colors, and shapes.

Look back at De Longpré’s painting and the pages from the Islamic herbal manuscript. Why do you think the artists who made these works thought it was important to represent nature?

An extended reflection activity could involve students creating book covers as well as a written introduction answering some of the questions above and sharing what they discovered.

**Curriculum Connections** California Arts Standards for Public Schools—Visual Arts

2.VA:Re7.1: Perceive and describe aesthetic characteristics of one’s natural world and constructed environments.

3.VA:Cn10: Develop a work of art based on observations of surroundings.

Next Generation Science Standards

Understandings about the Nature of Science. Scientific Knowledge is Based on Empirical Evidence.

K-2 Scientists look for patterns and order when making observations about the world.

Prepared by Billie Rae Vinson with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) Education Department