

Painting With Soil

and Abandoned Mine
Drainage Sediments

Soils are one of our most important natural resources. They also are important for the beauty their many colors add to our landscape. 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.

Materials:

- Soil (dried in air)
- Hammer/mallet
- Mortar and pestle (rubber-tipped)
- Paper cup (4 oz.)
- Pencils
- Ink pens (black, different tip sizes)
- Paint brushes (different kinds and sizes)
- Artist acrylic (clear gloss medium)
- Sponges and rags
- Water color paper
- Masking tape

Procedure:

Soils

1. Gather many colors of soil. (AMD is reddish/yellowish)
2. Place dried soil on a piece of paper and crush into pieces with hammer or mallet. (Figure A.)

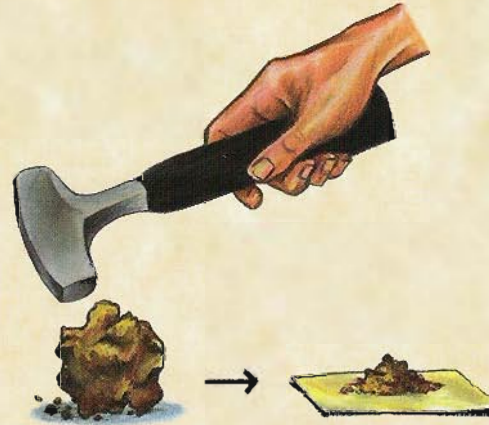


Figure A

3. Place some of the crushed soil into a mortar. Use a rubber-tipped pestle to crush the soil into a fine powder. Repeat to crush all of the different colored soils.



Figure B

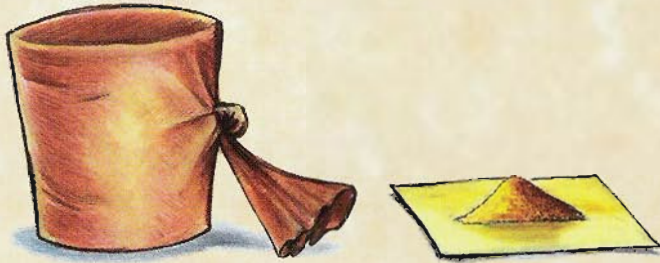


Figure C

4. Place some powdered soil in a paper cup. Wrap a knee-high hose over the top 2 or 3 times. Turn cup upside down over a piece of paper and gently shake out finely powdered soil.
5. Place the different soils in paper cups. Notice the colors and textures.

Artwork

1. Lightly sketch artwork on water-color paper with pencil. When satisfied with composition, use ink for permanent lines.
2. With masking tape, carefully tape paper edges to table or board. This is done so that the artwork will dry flat.
3. Pour small amount of artist's clear acrylic paint in small paper cups. Add small amounts of finely powdered soil. You may also want to add a few drops of water to the soil mix.

4. 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. Layering the colors. When your artwork is dry, you may want to apply another layer of soil paint.
7. You may want to use a black ink pen to make finishing touches on your artwork.

Activity Time:

The estimated time is about 1 or 2 hours.

Janis Lang, the artist who produced the soil paintings featured in this planner, is a Physical Science Technician with the NRCS Soil Survey Laboratory in Lincoln, Nebraska. Janis has based the soil painting activity given above on the techniques she used to produce these paintings.

“The trick with painting with landscapes is that it’s normally hard to get the color right. But when I paint with soil, the color comes from nature—and it’s exactly right.”

—Janis Lang