

Kindergarten, First Grade

Nature can teach us about impermanence and appreciation of the present moment. In this lesson, students will explore impermanence in nature, and they'll create their own nature mandala that reflects impermanence and nature's gifts.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to create a nature mandala and explore the concept of impermanence.

Materials and preparation

- Class set of the [Mandala Coloring](#) worksheet
- [The Mandala Book: Patterns of the Universe](#) by Lori Bailey Cunningham
- Outdoor space to collect items from nature and create mandalas
- Small brown paper bags
- Chime
- Camera
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Images of mandalas

Key terms

- nature mandala
- impermanence

Attachments

- Mandala Coloring (PDF)

Introduction (15 minutes)

- Bring the class outside to an area where they can collect items from nature and create their mandalas.
- Join them together in a circle, either seated or standing.
- Invite them to calm their bodies and take a few deep breaths.
- Have students notice the clouds.
- Ask them, "What is happening to the clouds?" Listen to their responses, and explain that the clouds are moving and changing.
- Have them notice the air or wind on their skin.
- Ask, "What is happening to the wind?" Listen to their responses, and explain that the wind is moving and changing.
- Ask the class, "What else in nature is created and then changes?" Build upon their answers, then offer some examples that were not shared, such as leaves on the trees in autumn, rain, or sounds that come and go.
- Ask, "Is there anything in nature that stays around forever?" Explain that almost nothing in nature stays the same forever; everything is always changing!
- Share with students that this concept is called **impermanence**, which means that nothing is permanent, or around forever, and things are always changing.
- Ask them to repeat the word "impermanence" after you.
- Open to some pages of *The Mandala Book* to show some examples of mandalas.
- Pause and ask the class, "What do you notice? What do you wonder?"
- Explain that these images are called "mandalas."

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- Show the front cover of the book.
- Point to the word "Mandala," and ask them to repeat the word.
- Tell students that mandalas are created from items in nature. Then, they are left out in nature as a reminder that nothing is permanent.
- Ask, "What word do we use when we talk about how nothing is permanent?" Have the class repeat the word "impermanence."

Explicit Instruction/Teacher modeling (10 minutes)

- Tell students that they will work with partners to collect items in nature, such as rocks, leaves, flowers, and feathers. Then, they will come back together and use the items they collected to create one large nature mandala.
- Ask the class to come up with a set of rules to follow when they're choosing items in nature. Build upon their answers, and say, "Keep your hands and feet safe, go slow, and use mindfulness."
- Inform them that everything they collect will go into their brown paper bag. Remind them to only pick up safe objects, and to stay clear of animals and three-leaf plants if you have poison ivy in your area. Also, emphasize that they should be gentle with plants.
- Model how to choose items in nature, going slow, choosing 10 safe objects, and placing each in your brown paper bag.
- Divide the class into partners, and distribute paper bags.
- Set boundaries for how far they may go to collect their items.
- Explain that they will have 10 minutes to collect, and you will ring the chime when it's time to return.
- Dismiss partners, and remind each student to choose 10 items to bring back to class.

Guided Practice (20 minutes)

- While students are collecting their nature items, draw a large circle with a stick, or make a circle with sticks or stones.
- Place a large item in the center of the circle, such as a rock, pine cone, or shell.
- Ring the chime after 10 minutes.
- Join the class together in a circle, seated.
- Ask them to raise their hands if they have pine cones, rocks, leaves, flowers, or feathers. Take note of who raises their hands.
- Have them vote to decide what goes inside the center ring of the mandala.
- Explain that each partner will have a turn to come up to the mandala and place their items inside.
- After the class has voted on the item that will go inside the mandala's center ring, ask students who have that item to come up and create a ring around the center object.
- Again, ask the class to vote on what item they would like to put in the second ring.
- Tell students who have that item to come into the mandala and create another ring together.
- Continue repeating these steps (voting on an item, creating another ring) until the class has created a pattern with at least five rings. Ideally, each ring will be a different nature item.

Independent working time (20 minutes)

- Tell the class to silently stand in a circle for a minute, and to notice all of the details in their class mandala. Have them reflect on the colors, shapes, and sizes.
- Ask them what they notice. Take a few comments.
- Share with the students that their mandala will be left in nature, but you will take a photo of it.
- Explain that even though the photo will capture the mandala, at the end of the day, the mandala is impermanent and won't last forever (just like everything else).
- Ask, "What can we learn from impermanence? Why is it important to learn about impermanence?"
- Emphasize that understanding impermanence is important because it teaches us that any good or bad moment, experience, or place won't last forever. It can be useful to remember this when we are going through a tough time, and it can help us appreciate the beautiful moments while we are experiencing them.
- Return to the classroom, and pass out the Mandala Coloring worksheet.
- Have students color in their nature mandalas and draw their understanding of impermanence.

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Differentiation

Enrichment: Ask advanced students to draw their own nature mandala.

Support: Work one-on-one or in small groups with some students while they collect their nature items and/or place them in the mandala.

Assessment (5 minutes)

- During partner time and the class mandala activity, observe students to assess their understanding of impermanence and how to create a nature mandala.

Review and closing (5 minutes)

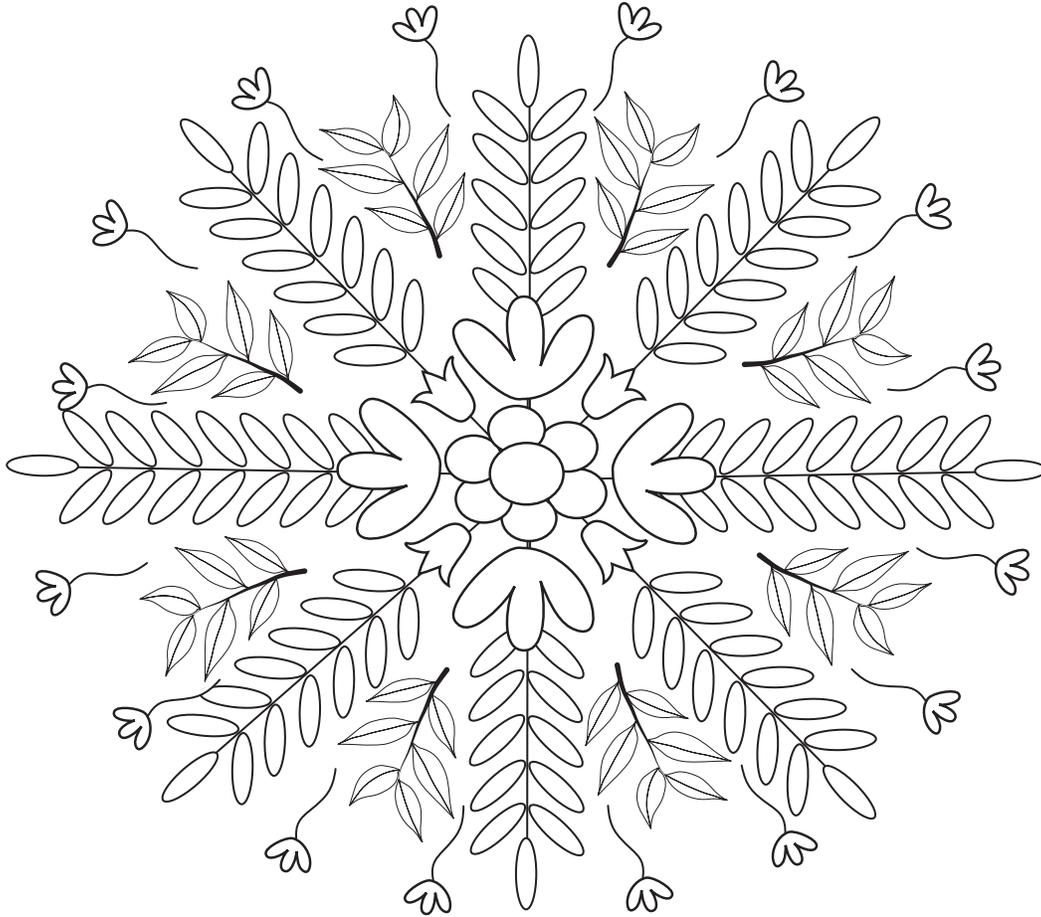
- Gather students back in a circle, and ask them to share what they learned today. Take 2-3 comments.
- Build upon their answers, and remind them of the definition of impermanence from the beginning of class. (Impermanence means that nothing is permanent, and things are always changing.)
- Explain the importance of understanding impermanence: "When we are having a challenging time, we can remind ourselves that the experience won't last forever. Instead, we can savor the good times and positive experiences we have."

Name _____

Date _____

Mandala Coloring

Directions: Color in nature mandala below as a reminder of the gifts we may find in nature.



Draw a picture below to show what you learned about impermanence.

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