

Rediscovering Everyday Nature Through Cyanotype

A Kindergarten Curriculum for Observation, Imagination, and Art

Age Group: 5–8 years old

Recommended Group Size: 15-30 children

Duration: 90-120 minutes

Setting: Classroom with access to sunlight and water

Theme: *Rediscover overlooked nature in daily life*

About This Curriculum

A fallen leaf, a broken twig, or a seed on the sidewalk may seem ordinary at first. Children pass these small pieces of nature every day, often without stopping to look. This curriculum uses **cyanotype as a tool for seeing again**. Children are invited to notice the tiny details of ordinary natural objects and imagine the stories behind leaves.

Through cyanotype, familiar objects are transformed into blue-and-white images. When children see the same leaf in a new form, they are encouraged to look again—and perhaps notice something they missed the first time.

The goal is to help children become more curious about the nature already around them.

Materials

Natural Materials

Collect a variety of safe, ordinary natural objects before the workshop.

Try to include both “beautiful” and imperfect objects like:

- fresh leaves
- fallen leaves
- leaves with holes
- flower petals
- pine needles
- thin pieces of bark
- other locally available plant materials

Cyanotype Materials

- pre-treated cyanotype paper
- transparent acrylic sheets or clear frames
- clips or clothespins

- trays or containers for rinsing
- clean water
- paper towels
- a sunny outdoor area

Lesson Plan

Part 1: Plants Sharing

15–30 minutes

Here are several activities facilitators can choose from before beginning the cyanotype process. Choose one or two based on the children's age or available time. These activities are designed to help children slow down and look more carefully while develop curiosity about things they might normally ignore.

Activity Option 1 — Nature Treasure Table

Place a variety of ordinary natural objects on a table and invite children to touch and observe them. Possible prompts:

- Which one feels the softest?
- Which one feels rough?
- Which one has the funniest edge?
- Can you find tiny lines?
- Which one would you normally walk past?

The goal encourage children to observe plants in detail.

Activity Option 2 — Tiny Eyes Challenge

Ask each child to choose one natural object. Using a magnifying glass, if available, invite them to find one detail they did not notice at first.

It might be a tiny hole, a crack, or a change in color.

Children can point to their discovery or show it to a partner.

A simple prompt can be: "Look closely. Can you find something you did not see before?"

Activity Option 3 — The Story of a Leaf

Prepare several leaves that are torn, curled, spotted, dried, or partially eaten.

Hold up one leaf and ask: "What do you think happened to this leaf?"

Children can invent their own stories.

You may continue with questions such as:

- What do you notice that gives you that idea?
- Where do you think this leaf has been?
- If this leaf could talk, what would it tell us?

The purpose is to help children use real visual details as the starting point for imagination.

Activity Option 4 — What Does It Look Like?

Show children several ordinary natural objects and ask:
“What else could this be?”

A leaf might look like a fish, a wing, a boat, a hand, or a tiny map.

Encourage unusual answers. This activity helps children move from simply identifying an object to seeing it in new ways.

Moving Into Cyanotype

After completing one or two activities, invite each child to choose a few natural objects for their cyanotype.

Encourage them to select something they noticed, imagined about, or became curious about during the activity.

Part 2 — Cyanotype Creation

40–60 minutes

Give each child one sheet of cyanotype paper.

Allow them to arrange their natural materials before the paper is exposed.

Once the child is satisfied, secure the objects with a transparent sheet and clips.

Expose the cyanotype according to the instructions for the paper being used.

Exposure to Sunlight

5–10 minutes

Place the prepared cyanotypes under direct sunlight.

Exposure time will vary depending on the strength of the sunlight and weather conditions, but it usually takes around **5–10 minutes**.

Invite children to watch the paper gradually change color. When the exposed areas of the paper turn from their original color to a pale or grayish blue, the print is usually ready to rinse.

Rinsing

10 - 15 minutes

Before rinsing, have children put on **protective gloves**.

Prepare trays or containers filled with clean water. With adult supervision, children can place their own cyanotypes into the water and gently move the paper back and forth for 1 minute.

Encourage them to watch carefully as the print begins to change.

The lighter areas will become clearer, while the blue areas will gradually deepen.

Once rinsing is complete, carefully remove the artwork and place it on a flat surface or drying rack.

Allow children to observe the transformation before moving on to the final reflection.

Part 3 - The Reveal

10–15 minutes

Bring the finished cyanotypes back to the children.

Give them time simply to look.

Then place the original natural object beside its cyanotype.

Ask: **“What can you see now that you didn't notice before?”**

Return to the question from the beginning.

Hold up another ordinary or imperfect leaf.

Ask: **“Do you think this leaf is interesting now?”**

Children can respond verbally, raise their hands, or vote using stickers.

Optional Extension — Our Everyday Nature Garden

If time and materials allow, create one collaborative cyanotype.

Prepare a large cyanotype surface or several sheets that can later be assembled together.

Each child contributes **one natural shape**.

Together, the class creates:

Our Everyday Nature Garden

Explain:

“One leaf can look very small. But when everyone brings something they noticed, we can make a whole world together.”

The finished piece can remain with the classroom or community organization.

Facilitator Guidelines

Ask more questions than you answer.

The facilitator is not there to explain every plant. Curiosity should come before information.

Avoid “good” and “bad” artwork. This keeps attention on observation rather than artistic skill.

Let imperfect nature stay imperfect.

Do not automatically replace broken leaves with prettier ones.

A damaged leaf often contains more opportunities for observation and storytelling.

Keep instructions short.

For kindergarten students, demonstrate one step at a time. Show first. Then let them try.

Allow imagination.

A leaf can be both a leaf and a dragon wing.

Scientific observation and imagination do not need to compete.

Safety Notes

- Children should use pre-treated cyanotype paper rather than mixing cyanotype chemicals themselves.
- Adults should supervise exposure, rinsing, and cleanup.
- Confirm material and allergy requirements with the participating school or organization before the workshop.
- Children wear gloves during the rinsing process and wash their hands after handling natural materials.