

Painting With Sunlight

A Cyanotype Curriculum for Participants with Down Syndrome

Recommended Age: Children and young adults

Group Size: 8–20 participants

Duration: 90–120 minutes

Setting: Residential or community center with access to a safe outdoor area, sunlight, and water

About This Curriculum

This workshop uses cyanotype as a way to create without relying heavily on precise drawing skills.

Participants begin by choosing plants they like, observing them closely, drawing and tracing their shapes, and finally arranging them on cyanotype paper. The same leaf is explored in several different ways, with sunlight becoming part of the final image-making process.

The workshop should move slowly, with short instructions, visual demonstrations, and one step at a time.

Materials

- pre-treated cyanotype paper
- drawing paper
- drawing tools
- transparent acrylic sheets
- clips
- trays of clean water
- gloves
- paper towels
- safe leaves and other natural materials
- access to direct sunlight

Lesson Plan

Part 1 — Choose a Plant

15–20 minutes

Bring participants to a safe garden or outdoor area to choose one or two leaves that catch their attention.

Choosing their own plant gives participants a decision to make before the artwork even begins.

Safety

Check the outdoor area with staff before the workshop.

Only collect plants that staff confirm are safe to touch. Participants should stay with facilitators or center staff while outside.

Part 2 — Look Closely

10–15 minutes

Back inside, invite participants to explore the plants through sight, touch, and smell when appropriate.

Keep questions concrete:

- Is it smooth or rough?
- Is it big or small?
- What do you like about it?

Participants can answer with words, gestures, pointing, or simply showing what they noticed.

Part 3 — Trace the Shape

10–15 minutes

Place the plant directly onto another sheet of paper. Demonstrate how to slowly trace around its edge.

This gives participants a way to record the plant without depending as much on precise freehand drawing.

Part 4 — Introduce Cyanotype

5–10 minutes

Keep the explanation short and visual.

Show:

1. cyanotype paper
2. a plant placed on top
3. sunlight
4. a finished print

Introduce the idea simply:

“This time, sunlight is going to help us make the picture.”

For more detailed explanation, use the **Cyanotype Visual Guide**.

Part 5 — Arrange the Artwork

15–20 minutes

Give each participant one sheet of cyanotype paper. Let them choose where the plants should go and how they want to arrange them.

When they are finished, secure the plants under the clear sheet.

Part 6 — Sunlight and Rinsing

15–20 minutes

Bring the prepared cyanotypes into direct sunlight. Let participants watch the paper change.

After exposure, rinse the prints in clean water for 1 minutes with assistance as needed. Give participants time to watch the blue color deepen and their images appear.

Return each finished print to its maker once it is ready.

Part 7 — Compare and Share

10–15 minutes

Place each participant's drawing, tracing, and cyanotype together. Keep the final reflection simple.

Ask Questions like:

- Which one do you like best?
- Show me your favorite part.

But remember, sharing should always be optional.

Facilitator Notes

Show first, then let them try.

Avoid giving several instructions at once. Demonstrate one step before moving to the next.

Keep choices manageable.

A few clear options are often easier than a large pile of materials.

Let participants communicate in different ways.

Words are not the only way to show a preference. Pointing, choosing, arranging, and gestures are also meaningful.

Do not rush the reveal.

Watching the image appear is an important part of the workshop.

Safety Notes

- Use pre-treated cyanotype paper.
- Only use plants that are known to be safe.
- Supervise all outdoor collection, exposure, and rinsing.
- Use gloves during rinsing when appropriate.
- Wash hands after handling natural materials.