DIRECTOR'S LESSON PACKAGE OVERVIEW

Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee

K–2 Literacy Package — Informed by 4-H STEM Reading Connections 2025
Created by Helix Education in partnership with Beyond School Bells

📋 FOR	📖 USE	➡️ FRONTLINE EDUCATORS
Program directors, site coordinators, and lead educators	Background knowledge, standards alignment, materials planning, and reporting data to implement this 3-lesson unit	Should use the Grab & Go Lesson Package

Unit Overview

This three-lesson unit uses ***Nature is an Artist*** by Jennifer Lavallee as the anchor text for an integrated K–2 literacy and STEAM experience. The book takes students on a journey through the ways nature creates beauty everywhere—through wind, water, ice, animals, and plants. This theme of **curiosity and wonder** runs through every lesson.

Lesson-at-a-Glance

#	Lesson Focus	Lesson Overview	SOR Skill	STEAM Activity
1	**Introducing Nature's Art & Phonological Awareness**	Students are introduced to the book and the concept of nature as artist. They explore how wind, water, ice, and animals create art outdoors. The lesson builds foundational literacy through phonological awareness using nature words from the book.	Phonemic Awareness (rhyming, segmenting, phoneme substitution)	Students create ephemeral art using only natural materials outdoors, inspired by artist Andy Goldsworthy.
2	**Vocabulary in Context & Natural Paint**	Students act as Word Detectives to explore five key vocabulary words (medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture) using text and picture clues. They participate in a shared reading with vocabulary stops, then make their own paint from natural materials just as indigenous artists have done.	Vocabulary in context (text + picture clues, word maps)	Students mix natural materials (berries, turmeric, grass, mud) with water to create natural paint and use it to paint a nature scene.
3	**Fluency, Retelling & Mysteries of Nature**	Students retell Nature is an Artist in sequential order and practice fluency with echo and partner reading. They then conduct a hands-on erosion experiment using soil, sand, gravel, water, and wind to	Fluency: phrasing, expression, echo & partner reading	Students retell the story using picture cards; read with expression using echo and partner reading; conduct an erosion science experiment.

#	Lesson Focus	Lesson Overview	SOR Skill	STEAM Activity
		observe how nature carves the land.		

Nebraska ELA Standards Alignment

Grade	Literary Text (Reading)	Science of Reading Focus
K	**LA.K.RP** With adult help, retell stories with details and identify the main message.	**LA.K.F.2.c** Count, make, and segment words into syllables. (L1) **LA.K.F.4** Read smoothly and correctly. (L3)
1st	**LA.1.RP.1** Retell a story using important details.	**LA.1.F.2.a** Segment and blend phonemes in words. (L1) **LA.1.F.4.a** Read and understand first-grade books with expression. (L3)
2nd	**LA.2.RP.1** Retell stories and explain the important lessons within them.	**LA.2.F.2.a** Manipulate phonemes (substitution) to build new words. (L1) **LA.2.F.4.a** Read aloud a variety of texts smoothly, correctly, and with expression. (L3)

Lesson Structure

Each lesson is designed for **60 minutes** in an out-of-school time (OST) setting. The timing below is flexible and can be adjusted based on your group's needs. The full lesson includes welcome and closing time, which can be removed if already included in your programming. For programs that prefer to divide lessons into literacy and project days, see the recommended split structure on the right.

Standard 60-Minute Lesson	Time
Welcome & Check-In	**5 min**
Activate Prior Knowledge	**5 min**
Science of Reading Mini Lesson	**10 min**
Read Aloud or Shared Reading	**15 min**
STEAM Activity	**20 min**
Closing & Celebration	**5 min**

Divided Lesson Structure

Day 1 – Literacy Focus

Lesson Component	Time
Welcome & Check-In	**5 min**
Activate Prior Knowledge	**5 min**
Science of Reading Mini Lesson	**10+ min**
Read Aloud or Shared Reading	**15 min**

Day 2 – STEAM Project

Lesson Component	Time
Welcome & Check-In	**5 min**
Activate Prior Knowledge	**5 min**
STEAM Activity	**30+ min**
Closing & Celebration	**5 min**

Lesson Modifications

Each lesson contains modifications throughout for grade-level specific modifications (Kindergarten, First, and Second), along with modifications for Emerging and Advanced students.

Emerging	**Emerging Learner** An emerging learner is just beginning to develop foundational literacy or numeracy skills and relies heavily on hands-on manipulatives, visual cues, and direct adult support.
Advanced	**Advanced Learner** An advanced learner quickly grasps new concepts and can independently apply them to different tasks or creative projects without needing step-by-step instructions. They often show curiosity beyond the basic lesson, using more descriptive language or complex logic to solve problems and explain their thinking.

Literacy Background & Staff Preparation Guide

This unit integrates three Science of Reading skills across three lessons — phonemic awareness, vocabulary in context, and fluency. The sections below give you the background knowledge to understand each skill, run the activity yourself, and prepare your staff. **You do not need a teaching degree to facilitate these lessons effectively.**

Lesson 1 — Phonological Awareness

What it is	Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and work with the sound structure of spoken language—including syllables, rhymes, and individual phonemes. Phonemic awareness is a subset focused specifically on individual sounds (phonemes), entirely by ear, not by sight. It is one of the strongest early predictors of reading success. It is not about letters or spelling; it is purely about sound.
Why it matters	Students who can hear the building blocks of words—from syllables down to phonemes—are better able to decode unfamiliar words and spell. Phonological awareness is a critical foundation for phonics. Research shows it is best taught explicitly and playfully.
Skills in this unit	**Kindergarten: Syllable Clapping:** Clapping the syllables in nature words. Activity: Clap and count syllables in na-ture, art-ist, but-ter-fly, wa-ter-fall, ca-ter-pil-lar. **1st Grade: Elkonin Boxes:** Segmenting a word into its individual sounds by pushing a counter into a box for each phoneme heard. The word "leaf" has 4 letters but 3 sounds: /l/–/ē/–/f/ = 3 boxes. **2nd Grade: Phoneme Substitution:** Swapping one sound for another to build a new word. Example: Change /l/ in "leaf" to /b/ → "beef." Change /r/ in "rock" to /s/ → "sock."
How to run Elkonin Boxes	1. Draw or print 3–4 connected boxes on paper (one row per word). Laminated sheets can be reused. 2. Place small objects (coins, chips, beans) above the boxes, one per box. 3. Say the word slowly. As you say each sound out loud, push one object down into a box from left to right. 4. Count the objects in the boxes to confirm the number of sounds. **Key rule:** Count sounds, not letters. "Leaf" = /l/ /ē/ /f/ = 3 sounds, 3 boxes. "Nest" = /n/ /ĕ/ /s/ /t/ = 4 sounds, 4 boxes.
Director try-it	Practice segmenting these words before the lesson, say each sound aloud as you push a counter: • "leaf" → /l/ /ē/ /f/ = 3 sounds (l - ee - f) • "rock" → /r/ /ɒ/ /k/ = 3 sounds (r - o - k) • "nest" → /n/ /ĕ/ /s/ /t/ = 4 sounds (n - e - s - t)
What to tell staff	"For K, make syllable clapping physical and fun — let students feel each jaw drop as a syllable. For 1st grade, always model Elkonin Boxes yourself first, saying sounds aloud as you push. Never spell

	the word — sounds only. For 2nd grade, celebrate when students find that swapping one tiny sound creates a whole new word."

Lesson 2 — Vocabulary in Context	
What it is	Vocabulary in context means using surrounding text and pictures to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word, rather than giving students a definition before they encounter it. This mirrors how skilled readers naturally build vocabulary. This is completed in lesson 2, so students encounter the words through reading in lesson 1.
Why it matters	Vocabulary is the bridge between decoding (sounding out words) and comprehension (understanding what you read). OST settings are uniquely positioned for vocabulary development because conversation and exploration are less restricted than during the school day.
Words in this unit	**Medium —** In art, the material an artist uses to make their art. Mud, clay, paint, leaves — all mediums! Connect: What medium did you use in your ephemeral art? Connect: Have you ever seen erosion happen — a creek after a rainstorm, or sand washed away at a beach? **Carve —** To slowly cut or shape something. Wind carves rock. Water carves canyons. **Erosion —** When wind or water slowly wears away rock or soil over a very long time. Count the syllables: e-ro-sion = 3!
Teaching strategy	**Model the Word Detective process (Look → Picture Clue → Context Clue → Guess & Check) aloud before students try:** 1. Point to the word and read it aloud. Look at the picture clue. Read the sentence around it. reasonable guess using the sentence context — does it make sense? 2. Look at the picture on the same page. What clues does the image give? 3. Read the sentence around the word. Are there context clues in the surrounding text? 4. Make a reasonable guess. Try it in the sentence — does it make sense?
Grade-level practice	**K:** Teacher points to the picture + word. Students say it aloud and draw what it means. **1st:** Sentence frame: "The word [___] means ___ because in the book it says/shows ___." **2nd:** Students write an original sentence using the vocabulary word in their own context.
What to tell staff	"Don't give students the definition first, let them be word detectives. Point to the picture, read the sentence around the word, and ask 'What do you think this means?' Accept reasonable guesses and guide them toward meaning using the book as evidence."

Lesson 3 — Reading Fluency	
What it is	Reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately, at an appropriate pace, and with expression (prosody). It is the bridge between decoding individual words and understanding the full meaning of a passage.
Why it matters	When students read word by word, their working memory is consumed by decoding, and comprehension suffers. Fluent reading frees the brain to focus on meaning. OST settings are ideal for fluency practice because the stakes feel lower and repetition feels natural and fun.
Strategies in this unit	**Echo Reading (K):** Educator reads a sentence with expression; students immediately repeat it, matching the tone and pacing. **Partner Reading (1st):** Student pairs take turns reading one page each. Partners give a fluency rating if their partner reads with expression. **Independent Re-Read (2nd):** Students self-rate their reading on a 1–2–3 scale for expression and re-read until they reach a 3.
Director try-it	Read this robotically: *"Na-ture-paints-with-sun-sets."* Now read it with expression: *"Nature paints with sunsets!"* That contrast is exactly what students should practice. Model it clearly for staff before the lesson.
Story retelling cards	The retelling picture cards (one per nature-art type from the book: wind, water, ice, animals, plants) help students sequence the story before partner reading. Students arrange them in order from memory, then use the cards as a reference while reading their section with a partner.

What to tell staff	"Model fluent reading first — big expression, clear pauses, awe and wonder. Then have students try. If a student reads flatly, say 'Let's try that again like a nature documentary narrator!' Fluency is not about perfection — it's about bringing the story to life. Keep it playful and low-pressure."

Grant & Reporting Data

This unit supports the following reporting categories for **21st CCLC and similar OST grant programs**:

- **21st CCLC Program Quality:** Literacy enrichment aligned to Nebraska ELA standards (K–2). Each lesson targets grade-level reading standards in literary text, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and writing from a mentor text.
- **STEAM Integration:** Visual Art + Science + Creative Expression (L1: Ephemeral Art), Science + Art + Sensory Exploration (L2: Natural Paint), Science + Observation + Math (L3: Mysteries of Nature / Erosion Experiment). All activities align to ELG Standard M.02.
- **School-Day Alignment:** Phonological awareness, vocabulary, and fluency instruction mirrors the Nebraska Science of Reading framework at each grade level. This unit reinforces, not replaces, school-day instruction.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Grade-level modifications are built into every lesson for K, 1st, and 2nd grade learners in a multi-grade OST setting, supporting both emerging and advanced learners.

Recommended Documentation

If your program is collecting impact and student data, the following options are recommended:

- Photograph completed STEAM projects (Square Sculptures, Nature Observation Drawings, Mysteries of Nature)
- Collect student Check-In Forms to document character development and behavioral tiered data
- Note which grade-level Science of Reading activities were implemented
- Record attendance for each of the 3 sessions
- Optional: Have students write one sentence about what they learned for a portfolio artifact

Materials & Budget Planning

All materials for this unit are intentionally chosen to be **low-cost and easy to source**. Most items are everyday classroom or household supplies. Where a standard item may not be available, substitutions are listed — nearly every material in this unit has a free or no-cost alternative. The **Student Materials and Printables** package includes all printable items needed per student.

Material	Quantity	Lesson	Substitution / Notes
Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee	1 per class	All	Free library copy or YouTube read-aloud
Helix K-2 Check-In Forms	1 per student	L1, L2	Draw simple faces on sticky notes; post feelings chart on board
Natural materials (rocks, leaves, sticks, pinecones, flowers)	1 tray per group	L1	Collect outdoors or prepare a nature tray
Small cups + mixing sticks	1 per student	L1	For natural paint mixing (L2)
White paper	1 per student	L1, L3	Any available white paper
Scissors, glue, crayons/markers	1 per student or shared	L1, L3	Share supplies across groups
Elkonin Box sheets (1st grade)	1 per student	L1	Draw 3 boxes on any paper

Counters/coins (1st grade)	Set per student	L1	Bingo chips, buttons, beans, or ripped paper
Natural paint materials (berries, turmeric, grass, mud)	1 per student	L2	Check for allergies; outdoor collection or pre-prepared
Clipboards	1 per student	L2	Use any notebook or binder; draw on any paper
Story retelling cards (Mon–Sun)	1 per student pair	L3	1 per small group; fill with distinct layers in advance
Vocabulary word cards (medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture)	1 per student	L3	Print large for whole-group display or one set per student
Watering can / small cups + portable fan (L3)	1 set per student	L3	For rain and wind simulation in erosion experiment
Whiteboards (optional)	1 per student	L1	Use for SOR whiteboard activities
Optional: clay or playdough (L3 landmark sculpting)	1 tray per group	L2	Students sculpt their own version of a famous landmark

Director's Prep Guide

The following provides an overview of prep for the full unit and itemized prep for each day. This can be completed by a director or site coordinator, or assigned to a staff member who receives prep time.

BEFORE THE UNIT BEGINS (ALL 3 LESSONS)

- Obtain a copy of Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee.
- **Print required items:** Helix Daily Check-In Form (2 copies per student — L1 and L2), Vocabulary Word Cards (1 set for display, L2), Retelling Picture Cards (1 set per group, L3), Optional: images of Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral land art (L1); photos of Grand Canyon, Chimney Rock, and Toadstool Geological Park (L3 erosion) (1 per student, L3), Optional: images of Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral land art (1–4 per class, L1).
- **Organize grade-specific Science of Reading materials.** Determine whether students will be grouped by grade or whole group for SOR activities. K: Print Rhyming Picture Cards (L1). 1st: Print Elkonin Boxes and review instructions. 2nd: Prepare whiteboards and markers or paper.
- Collect or prepare a nature materials tray for L1 (rocks, leaves, sticks, pinecones, flowers, grass). Identify an outdoor space for L1 ephemeral art and L2 natural paint exploration.
- **Secure supplies for each lesson:** L1 – Natural materials (rocks, leaves, sticks, pinecones, grass), camera/tablet for photos, optional Andy Goldsworthy images. L2 – Natural paint materials (berries, turmeric, grass, mud), small cups, water, mixing sticks, brushes/Q-tips, observation sheets. L3 – Baking pans with layered gravel/sand/soil, small cups/watering cans, portable fan, tablecloths/trays; optional clay or playdough.
- Pre-fill baking pans with distinct visible layers of gravel, sand, and soil for L3 erosion experiment. Pre-fill small cups with a set amount of water. Set up a splash zone (tablecloths or trays to catch overflow).
- Optional: Create teacher examples of STEAM projects.

LESSON 1 CLASSROOM PREP – DAY OF

- Write "Nature is an Artist" on the board. Below it write: "How does nature make art?" Display 2–3 images of Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral land art.
- Set out Check-In Forms per student.
- Prepare the nature materials tray or confirm outdoor access for ephemeral art.
- Write today's target syllable words on the board: na-ture, beau-ti-ful, art-ist, wa-ter-fall, but-ter-fly.
- 1st grade: Review Elkonin Boxes instructions to familiarize with the concept.

LESSON 2 CLASSROOM PREP – DAY OF

- Set out natural paint materials: small cups with water, berries, turmeric, grass clippings, mud. Place brushes, Q-tips, or twigs at each table.
- Write the 5 vocabulary words on the board: Medium, Carve, Erosion, Pattern, Texture.
- Print or pre-write sentence frame strips for 1st grade ("The word ___ means ___ because in the book it shows ___.").
- Set out mini whiteboards and dry-erase markers at each table for 2nd grade vocabulary responses. Pre-label paint cups with color name for emerging learners.
- Bookmark specific pages in Nature is an Artist for shared reading stops.

LESSON 3 CLASSROOM PREP – DAY OF

- Set up erosion stations: distribute baking pans with layered soil/sand/gravel. Place cups of water and watering cans at each station. Prep tablecloths or trays under each pan.
- Write the fluency sentence strip on the board: "Nature paints with sunsets, carves with water, and weaves with wind."
- Print and cut retelling picture cards (wind, water, ice, animals, plants) for story retelling activity.
- Display photos of Chimney Rock, the Grand Canyon, Scottsbluff, and Toadstool Geological Park on the board or printed on cardstock.
- Optional: Set out clay or playdough at a separate station for L3 landmark sculpting extension.
- Option: Prepare a "Before and After" visual worksheet for emerging students to draw the landscape before and after water is poured.

FOR SCHOOL-BASED LEADERSHIP

Nature is an Artist — K–2 Literacy & STEAM Unit

A share-out for principals, superintendents, and school-based partners

Developed by: Helix Education in partnership with Beyond School Bells, informed by 4-H STEM Reading Connections 2025. Designed for K–2 students in out-of-school time (OST) settings.

Purpose: This 3-lesson unit uses *Nature is an Artist* by Jennifer Lavallee as an anchor text for integrated literacy and STEAM instruction.

What Students Are Doing

Over three 60-minute sessions, students engage with *Nature is an Artist* by Jennifer Lavallee, a nonfiction-style picture book that shows how nature creates art through wind, water, ice, animals, and plants. This theme of **curiosity and wonder** connects literacy, science, and art into a cohesive three-lesson unit.

#	Literacy Skill	STEAM Project	What Students Learn & Do
1	Phonemic Awareness — rhyming, segmenting & blending sounds	Ephemeral Art (Visual Art + Science + Creative Expression)	Clap syllables and segment/substitute phonemes; retell key ideas; create ephemeral art inspired by Andy Goldsworthy
2	Vocabulary in Context — text + picture clues	Natural Paint (Science + Art + Sensory Exploration)	Define vocabulary (medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture) using text and picture clues; make paint from natural materials and use it to paint a nature scene
3	Fluency — accuracy, expression, and partner reading	Fluency, Retelling & Mysteries of Nature (Fluency + Science + Observation)	Write and illustrate original “the story using retelling cards; practice fluency; conduct an erosion experimentthe their “the story using retelling cards; practice fluency; conduct an erosion experiment with soil, sand, sculptures

Alignment to School-Day Standards

This program directly reinforces Nebraska ELA standards being taught during the school day. OST staff are often not certified teachers, so this unit is specifically designed with scripted lesson plans so non-credentialed facilitators can implement high-quality, standards-aligned activities.

Grade	Nebraska ELA Standards	Connection to School Day
K	LA.K.RP · LA.K.F.2.c · LA.K.F.4	Retelling stories, syllable clapping, smooth and correct reading
1st	LA.1.RP.1 · LA.1.F.2.a · LA.1.F.4.a	Retelling with details, phoneme segmentation and blending, expressive reading
2nd	LA.2.RP.1 · LA.2.F.2.a · LA.2.F.4.a	Story retelling with lesson identification; phoneme substitution; expressive oral reading

Grant & Reporting Category Alignment

This unit supports the following reporting categories for **21st CCLC and similar OST grant programs:**

- **21st CCLC Program Quality:** Literacy enrichment aligned to Nebraska ELA standards (K–2) across literary text, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and fluency.
- **STEAM Integration:** Art + Math + Engineering (L1), Science + Math + Nature (L2), Visual Art + Math + Creative Expression (L3). Aligns to ELG Standard M.02.
- **School-Day Alignment:** Mirrors the Nebraska Science of Reading framework at each grade level. Reinforces, not replaces, school-day instruction.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Grade-level modifications built into every lesson for K, 1st, and 2nd grade learners in a multi-grade OST setting, with Emerging and Advanced learner supports.
- **Attendance & Engagement:** 3-session unit with structured check-in forms and portfolio artifacts for impact documentation.

Additional Notes

Extra space to provide additional context and notes for school-based leadership.

SCRIPTED LESSON PACKAGE

Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee

Lesson 1 of 3 — Introducing Nature's Art & Phonological Awareness

⏱ 60 minutes · STEAM Focus: Ephemeral Art (Visual Art + Science + Creative Expression)

Standards

Reading Prose & Poetry / Literary Text:

- K: LA.K.RP. With adult help, I can retell stories with details and show understanding of the main message or lesson.
- 1st: LA.1.RP.1: I can retell a story I know using important details.
- 2nd: LA.2.RP.1: I can retell stories and explain the important lessons within them.

Science of Reading: Phonological Awareness Focus:

- K: LA.K.F.2.c: I can count, make, and segment words into syllables.
- 1st: LA.1.F.2.a: I can break down short words and say each sound by itself. I can put sounds together to speak words.
- 2nd: LA.2.F.2.a: I can break down short words and say each sound by itself. I can put sounds together to speak words.

Objectives

Adult Language (SWBAT):

- Students will be able to retell the key ideas in Nature is an Artist and identify the central message that nature creates beautiful art all around us.
- Students will be able to count and clap syllables in nature words (K), segment phonemes using Elkonin Boxes (1st), or manipulate phonemes to build new words (2nd).

Student-Friendly Language:

- I can tell what nature makes in the story and why it's beautiful.
- I can hear and work with the sounds and syllables in words.

Reading & Check-In

- Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee
- Helix K-2 Daily Check-In Form (student copies)
- Whiteboard or chart paper + markers

Science of Reading Mini Lesson:

- Whiteboard + markers (teacher modeling)
- K: Syllable picture cards (nature images: leaf, flower, butterfly, caterpillar)
- 1st: Printed Elkonin Box sheets (3 boxes per row, 3+ rows)
- 2nd: Mini whiteboards + dry-erase markers OR lined paper

Optional / Hands-On

- 1st: Counters, coins, or bingo chips — 3 per student (for Elkonin box pushing)
- Small mirrors for students to watch mouth movements while producing sounds

STEAM Activity: Ephemeral Art:

- Outdoor access (or a nature tray with leaves, sticks, rocks, flowers, pinecones, grass)
- Flat outdoor surface OR large piece of butcher/craft paper per student
- Optional: Camera or tablet to photograph finished art before it's left outside
- Optional: Pictures of Andy Goldsworthy's land art
- Sentence strips pre-written with design principles: rhythm, balance, contrast, pattern

Before Students Arrive	
	• Write "Nature is an Artist" on the board. Below it write: "How does nature make art?"

- Display 2–3 images of Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral land art on the board or printed on cardstock.
- Set out Helix Check-In Forms and emoji/feeling word cards at each student's spot.
- Prepare the nature materials tray if going outdoors is not possible (rocks, leaves, sticks, pinecones, flowers, grass clippings).
- Write today's target syllable words on the board: na-ture, beau-ti-ful, art-ist, wa-ter-fall, but-ter-fly.
- 1st grade only: Draw 3 Elkonin boxes on chart paper. Practice pushing a coin per sound for "leaf" (/l/–/ē/–/f/) and "rock" (/r/–/ɒ/–/k/).

Welcome & Student Check-In (8–10 min)

Educator Notes & Script

Greet students warmly as they arrive and invite them to pick up their Check-In Form.

"Good [morning/afternoon], friends! Before we start, I want to know, how are you feeling right now? Look at the feeling words and emoji on your form and circle the one that shows how you feel inside today."

Give students 2–3 minutes. Then invite 3–4 volunteers to share.

"Who would like to share? Tell us: 'I am feeling ___ today because ___.' All feelings are welcome here!"

Say It Game: Feeling Word Focus

"Our feeling word today is curious. Say it together, CURIOUS! Now whisper curious."

"Curiosity is a character trait that makes you a better learner and a better person. When you are curious, you ask questions, you look closely, and you discover things other people miss. Today's book celebrates curiosity about the natural world. What is something you have been curious about?"

Allow 2-3 students to respond to what they have been curious about.

"Now, let's say curious again, but say it like you're very curious about something! Turn and say it to a friend."

"In our story today, we're going to discover how nature, including wind, water, ice, and animals, creates amazing art. Let's get curious about the world around us!"

Modifications:

- Emerging: Provide a printed emoji chart. Allow students to point to their feelings instead of writing or cutting.
- Advanced: Ask students to share two feelings and describe where they feel them in their body.

Activate Prior Knowledge (7 min)

Educator Notes & Script

Display or sketch a simple piece of art on the board.

"What is art? [Take responses.] Who makes art? Why do people make art?"

Take 3–5 responses, then shift thinking.

"What if I told you nature makes art too, without brushes or paint? Nature uses wind, water, ice, and even animals to create patterns, colors, and shapes. What might that look like?" (Option: Show example video of waves, water, and sand)

"Turn and tell a partner, can you think of something in nature that looks like art? [Examples: a spiderweb, a leaf skeleton, ice crystals, sand patterns, a bird's nest, sand texture, patterns in dirt or mud]"

"Today's book, Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee, takes us on a journey through the ways nature creates beauty everywhere. As I read, look for the different 'mediums.' That's the artist's word for materials that nature uses."

Science of Reading Mini Lesson: Phonological Awareness (10 min)

Educator-Led Instruction

Step 1 — Introduce (All Grades):

"Good readers listen to the sounds AND parts of words. Today we're going to be sound scientists — exploring the building blocks of words just like nature builds things from tiny pieces!"

Step 2 — Kindergarten (Syllable Clapping):

"We're going to clap the beats in our nature words! Watch me: 'na-ture' — [clap clap] — 2 beats! Now try with me: 'ar-tist' [clap clap]. 'but-ter-fly' [clap clap clap]. How many beats is 'leaf'? [clap — 1!]"

Use the Reading Rockets Syllable Games strategy: after clapping, hold up fingers for each syllable so students have a visual and tactile anchor.

Step 2 — 1st Grade (Elkonin Box Segmentation):

Elkonin Boxes are a research-based phonemic awareness tool. Each box represents ONE phoneme (sound), not one letter. The word "leaf" has 4 letters but only 3 sounds (/l/–/ē/–/f/), so it uses 3 boxes. Students push one counter per sound as they say it aloud.

"Watch me. The word is 'rock.' [/r/ — push] [/ɒ/ — push] [/k/ — push]. Three sounds, three boxes! Now let's try 'stone' together. Say it slowly..."

Practice words: leaf (/l/-/ē/-/f/ = 3), rock (/r/-/ɒ/-/k/ = 3), nest (/n/-/ĕ/-/s/-/t/ = 4), seed (/s/-/ē/-/d/ = 3)

Step 2 — 2nd Grade (Phoneme Substitution):

"We're going to change one sound in a nature word to make a brand new word! Start with 'leaf.' Change the /l/ to /b/... BEEF! Now try: change the /n/ in 'nest' to /b/. What word do you get? [best!] Change the /r/ in 'rock' to /s/. [sock!]"

Modifications:

- Emerging: For syllables, use a mirror — each jaw drop = one syllable. For Elkonin Boxes, pre-draw the boxes and start with 2-sound words (e.g., "bee").
- Advanced: Challenge students to sort their sound-swap words into nature vs. non-nature categories and explain why.

Kindergarten	1st Grade	2nd Grade
• Syllable Clapping: Clap the beats in nature words. "na-ture" [clap clap] = 2. "but-ter-fly" = 3. "leaf" = 1. Then ask: "How many beats in WATERFALL?" [3!]	• Elkonin Box Push: Model pushing one counter per sound. "Watch me: LEAF = /l/ [push] – /ē/ [push] – /f/ [push] = 3 sounds!" Students try: leaf, rock, nest, seed. Always say sounds aloud as you push. This is about sounds, not letters.	• Sound Swap: "Start with LEAF. Change /l/ to /b/... BEEF! Change /n/ in NEST to /b/. [best!] Change /r/ in ROCK to /s/. [sock!]" Students write two before → after word pairs on their whiteboard.

Read Aloud (15 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"Let's read! I want you to be a nature detective. Every time you hear about a way nature makes art, give me a silent thumbs up. Let's see how many we can count!"

Before reading, preview the cover:

"Look at the cover. What do you notice? [Take responses.] The title is Nature is an Artist, and the author is Jennifer Lavallee. She wrote the book. As we read, be a nature detective! Every time you hear about a way nature makes art, give me a silent thumbs up. Let's count how many we find!"

Pause points:

- "Have you ever seen a daisy? How would you finger paint a daisy on paper?"
- "Have you ever made a collage? What does a collage look like?"
- "The book says wind is carving this rock. What does carve mean? — Let's use the picture clue! [Point to the arch or carved rock image.]"
- "I heard the word 'caterpillar!' Let's clap the syllables together: cat-er-pil-lar. How many? [4!]"
- "What is the BIG idea of this book? What is the author trying to tell us? [Nature creates art everywhere, if we look closely.]"

Modifications:

- Emerging: Seat near the book. Use turn-and-talk for every question. Provide a sentence frame: "Nature makes art by ___."
- Advanced: Ask students to identify the author's purpose — why did Jennifer Lavallee write this book? What do they want readers to think differently about?

STEAM Activity: Ephemeral Art — Visual Art + Science + Creative Expression (20 min)

Educator Notes & Script

Part 1 — Introduce Andy Goldsworthy (3 min):

"I want to introduce you to an artist named Andy Goldsworthy. He creates art outside using only natural materials — leaves, sticks, rocks, ice, and flowers. And here's the most amazing part, he photographs his art and then leaves it outside to be changed by wind, rain, and time. That's called ephemeral art — art that doesn't last forever. Look at these examples. What do you notice? [Display images.]"

Part 2 — Create Your Own Ephemeral Art (14 min):

"Now YOU are going to be Andy Goldsworthy! Head outside and find natural materials — leaves, sticks, petals, rocks, grass, and pinecones. Then arrange them into a design. Think about patterns, colors, and shapes. There is no wrong way to do this!"

If staying indoors, use the nature materials tray. Students arrange on a flat piece of paper or the table surface.

Circulate and prompt with design principle language:

- Do you see a pattern in your design? What repeats?
- Is your design balanced? Does one side look like the other?
- What contrasts do you see — like light and dark, or rough and smooth?

"When you're happy with your creation, let's take a photo of it. Then, just like Andy Goldsworthy, we'll leave it outside for nature to change!"

Part 3 — Observation & Writing (3 min):

"On your paper, draw your creation. Below it, write: 'My nature art was made from ___. The title of the art piece is_____.'"

Modifications:

- Emerging: Provide a small sorting mat (3 circles labeled: soft, hard, rough) for students to sort materials before designing.
- Advanced / Early Finishers: Challenge students to incorporate 3 specific design principles (rhythm, balance, contrast) and label each in their drawing.

Closing & Celebration (5 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"Artists, you just created something extraordinary — art that will be changed by nature itself. Just like the wind carves rock and water paints canyons, you used nature to create something beautiful. Let's share our drawings!"

Invite 3–4 students to hold up their drawing and name one material they used.

"Before we go — let's do a quick sound check! I'll say a nature word, you clap the syllables: PETAL [pet-al, 2]. STONE [stone, 1]. WATERFALL [wa-ter-fall, 3]. You are sound scientists AND artists!"

Curiosity Wrap-Up:

"Remember, curiosity is a habit. Take it with you! Tonight, notice one thing in nature you've never noticed before. Tomorrow we'll share!"

"Tomorrow we'll read the whole book again and go deeper into the vocabulary, and we'll make paint from natural materials, just like nature's own colors. Get excited!"

SCRIPTED LESSON PACKAGE

Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee

Lesson 2 of 3 — Vocabulary in Context & Natural Paint

⏱ 60 minutes · STEAM Focus: Natural Paint (Science + Art + Sensory Exploration)

Standards

Reading Prose & Poetry / Literary Text:

- K: LA.K.RP.2: With adult help, I can tell the main character, setting, and important events in a story.
- 1st: LA.1.RP.6: I can ask and answer questions about important details in stories.
- 2nd: LA.2.RP.4: I can describe how a story is written, including how the problem is solved.

Science of Reading: Vocabulary Focus:

- K: LA.K.RP.6: With adult help, I can ask and answer questions about important details in stories.
- 1st: LA.1.F.3.d: I can read words with long vowel sounds. (applied to nature vocabulary)
- 2nd: LA.2.RP.6: I can ask and answer different kinds of questions about stories I have read.

Objectives

Adult Language (SWBAT):

- Students will be able to define and use key vocabulary words (medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture) in context using text and picture clues from Nature is an Artist.
- Students will be able to observe and describe how natural materials create color through a hands-on natural paint making activity.

Student-Friendly Language:

- I can explain what important words in our story mean using clues from the pictures and text.
- I can make paint from natural materials and describe what I observe.

Reading & Vocabulary	STEAM Activity: Natural Paint
• Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee • Vocabulary word cards: medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture • Chart paper for vocabulary anchor chart • Helix K-2 Daily Check-In Form (student copies) • Whiteboard + markers	• Collected natural items: berries, beets, spinach/grass, turmeric, coffee grounds, mud • Small bowls or paper cups (one per color source) • Water + small spoons or craft sticks for mixing • White watercolor paper or cardstock (1 sheet per student) • Paintbrushes OR Q-tips OR twigs (for "nature brushes") • Optional: Smocks or old t-shirts (berries stain!) • Optional: Magnifying glasses to observe color changes up close • Optional: Simple observation recording sheet (3 columns: material, color expected, color got)

Before Students Arrive	• Write the 5 vocabulary words on chart paper with a blank box next to each: medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture. • Prepare natural paint stations: place each natural color source (berries, beet, grass, turmeric, mud) in separate small bowls or cups with a little water. Add a mixing stick. • Distribute paper and brushes/twig-brushes at each seat. • Set up the Helix Check-In Forms and emoji cards.

- Bookmark specific vocabulary pages in Nature is an Artist for shared reading stops.
- Optional: Prepare a simple observation recording sheet (3 columns: material, color I expected, color I got).

Welcome & Student Check-In (5 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"Welcome back, nature artists! Before we dive in, let's check in. I have a question for you: What's one thing in nature you think is beautiful? It could be anything — a color, a shape, a sound."

Take 3–4 brief responses. Then:

"Today's feeling word is wonder — that feeling of being amazed by something. I have felt wonder when I looked at a mountain, or really blue sky and wondered why it is so beautiful and like that. What is one thing you have felt wonder looking at? (The response does not have to be something natural; it can be a robot, toy, etc.)"

"Today, we're going to look and listen really closely to our story and our materials and see if we can find some wonder."

Character Education — Perseverance Connection:

"Today we're going to make paint from natural materials. That means some mixes might surprise us, or not turn out how we expected. That's okay. Real scientists and artists try again. That's called perseverance — and it's one of the most important character traits you can have."

Activate Prior Knowledge (5 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"Yesterday we read Nature is an Artist for the first time. Before we read it again, I want to see what you remember. Turn and tell your partner: What is ONE way nature makes art from yesterday's story? I'll give you 30 seconds. Go!"

After partner talk, invite 2–3 shares.

"Today we're going to look even more closely — especially at 5 important words the author uses."

Science of Reading Mini Lesson: Vocabulary in Context (10 min)

Educator Notes & Script

Display the 5 vocabulary words. Use the "Word Detective" strategy: display, say together, use picture/text clues, then confirm meaning.

MEDIUM:

"In art, a medium is the material an artist uses. Mud, clay, paint, leaves — all mediums! Ask: What was the medium in your ephemeral art from yesterday?"

CARVE:

"To slowly cut or shape something. [Mime carving with your hand.] Wind carves rock. Water carves canyons. What tool do you use to carve a pumpkin?"

EROSION:

"When wind or water slowly wears away rock or soil. Ask: 'e-ro-sion' — how many syllables? [3!]"

PATTERN:

"Something that repeats. [Point to a pattern in the room.] Look for patterns as we read today!"

TEXTURE:

"How something feels. [Hold up a rough rock and a smooth leaf.] Bumpy, rough, smooth, soft — these are textures."

Modifications:

- Emerging: Point to picture + word. Students say the word aloud and draw a quick sketch of its meaning.
- Advanced: Ask students to connect 2 vocabulary words together in one sentence: "Erosion can create patterns because..."

Shared Reading: Full Book with Vocabulary Stops (15 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"Today we're reading the book together. Be a vocabulary detective and give a thumbs up when you hear one of our five words!"

Shared Reading Stops:

- At the erosion page: "Thumb up if you heard our word! What picture clue tells us what erosion means here?"
- At the pattern page: "What patterns do YOU see in this illustration? Describe the pattern to a partner."
- At the texture page: "Tell me two textures you've felt in nature. Rough? Smooth? Spiky? Silky?"

Comprehension Close (5 min):

"What is the most important word in this whole book — and WHY? Talk it over with a partner, then we'll share. [Students may say: medium, nature, artist, beautiful — all are valid with good reasoning.]"

Modifications:

- Emerging: Partner with a stronger reader. Provide vocabulary cards to hold during reading and hold up when heard.
- Advanced: Ask students to connect 2 vocabulary words together in one sentence: "Erosion can create patterns because..."

STEAM Activity: Natural Paint — Science + Art + Sensory Exploration (17 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"In our story, nature uses color everywhere — red berries, green leaves, brown earth. Today you're going to make YOUR OWN paint from natural materials, just like indigenous artists and nature itself!"

Part 1: Predict:

"Before you mix, look at your materials. What color do you think each one will make? [Have students write or whisper predictions: berries = red/purple? Turmeric = yellow? Grass = green? Mud = brown?]"

Part 2: Mix & Explore:

"Add a small amount of water to each natural material. Mix with your stick. What do you notice? Does the color match your prediction? Now use your brush, Q-tip, or twig to paint anything you'd like — you could paint something from nature, or just explore colors and patterns!"

Circulate and ask:

- Which natural material made the brightest color? The darkest?
- What do you notice as you mix? Does it smell? Feel different?
- Can you mix two natural colors together to make a new one?

Part 3: Observe & Record:

"On your observation sheet: draw the material, write the color you expected, and write the color you got. Were you surprised by any of them?"

Part 4: Paint:

"Now we are going to paint a nature scene using the paint we created. I want you to show patterns and texture as you paint. What are ways you can show this?" (Ex: paint blades of grass instead of just green, use lighter or darker painting to show how muddy something is)

Modifications:

- Emerging: Pre-label cups with the color name. Focus students on just 2 materials and guide their observation with: "What color do you see? Darker or lighter than you expected?"
- Advanced / Early Finishers: Challenge students to write 2–3 sentences using their science vocabulary: "The texture of the mud was ___. When I mixed it with water, I observed ___. The color it made was a medium for my painting because ___."

Closing & Celebration (5 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"Scientists and artists, hold up your natural paint creations! Look at the range of colors you created from things you can find outside. Nature has been doing this for millions of years."

"Before we go: point to something in this room that has texture. Now point to something that has a pattern. [Quick game.] You are using our vocabulary words like experts!"

Perseverance Wrap-Up:

"Did your first color mix look exactly how you wanted? Probably not — and that is GOOD. Artists and scientists try again and again until they discover something beautiful. Perseverance means you keep going. And you did."

"Tomorrow is our final day with Nature is an Artist. We'll practice our reading fluency and go on a nature walk to collect materials for a Mysteries of Nature discovery activity. See you then!"

SCRIPTED LESSON PACKAGE

Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee

Lesson 3 of 3 — Fluency, Retelling & Mysteries of Nature

⏱ 60 minutes · STEAM Focus: Mysteries of Nature (Science + Observation + Math)

Standards

Reading Prose & Poetry / Literary Text:

- K: LA.K.RP.1 & RP.4 — With adult help, retell stories with details; tell characters, setting, and events.
- 1st: LA.1.RP.1 — I can retell a story I know using important details.
- 2nd: LA.2.RP.1 — I can retell stories and explain the important lessons within them.

Science of Reading — Fluency Focus:

- K: LA.K.F.4 — I can read smoothly and correctly.
- 1st: LA.1.F.4.a — I can read and understand first-grade books with expression.
- 2nd: LA.2.F.4.a — I can read aloud a variety of second-grade texts smoothly, correctly, and with expression.

Writing Connection:

- K: LA.K.W.3 — With adult help, I can tell the order of events by drawing, speaking, and writing.
- 1st–2nd: Speaking & Listening — Students present their nature observations and explain their discoveries.

Objectives

Adult Language (SWBAT):

- Students will be able to retell Nature is an Artist in sequential order, identifying the central message and at least 3 examples of how nature creates art.
- Students will be able to read selected text from Nature is an Artist with appropriate phrasing and expression (prosody), using echo and partner reading strategies.
- Students will be able to describe the process of erosion and formulate oral predictions about the impact of water and wind on different land materials.

Student-Friendly Language:

- I can retell the story and explain the big idea in my own words.
- I can read part of our story with my best expression voice.
- I can guess how water and wind impact land.

Reading & Fluency	STEAM Activity: Erosion
• Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee • Mini whiteboards OR lined paper for fluency practice • Helix K-2 Check-In Form	• The "Land": Potting soil, play sand, and pea gravel. • The "Basin": baking pans/trays (one per small group). • The "Weather": Small cups, watering cans with rose spouts (for rain effect), and a portable fan (for wind). • Photos of the Grand Canyon, Chimney Rock, Scottsbluff, and Toadstool Geological Park. • Optional: Clay or playdough for the landmark sculpting activity. • Clean-up: Plastic tablecloths or trays to catch overflows, and plenty of paper towels.

Before Students Arrive	• Print and cut retelling picture cards (draw or print simple images representing each nature-art type from the book: wind, water, ice, animals, plants).

	• Pre-Construct the "Landscapes": Fill the baking pans ahead of time with distinct, visible layers of gravel, sand, and soil. • Pre-fill small cups with a set amount of water and prep a "splash zone" (tablecloths or trays). • Write the fluency sentence strip on the board: "Nature paints with sunsets, carves with water, and weaves with wind."

Welcome & Character Check-In: Moving Emotions (5 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"Welcome to our last day with Nature is an Artist! This has been an amazing journey. Before we start, let's do a Moving Emotions check-in."

Post emotion words around the room.

"I'm going to ask you to move to the feeling that describes how you feel about finishing our book today. Ready? Move to your word!"

Pause and observe where students are. Normalize all emotions.

"Look at where everyone is! It's perfectly okay to feel all of these. Let's take one deep breath together, in through the nose [pause]... and out through the mouth. We're ready!"

Character Education: Appreciation & Creativity:

"Today's character focus is appreciation — noticing and valuing the beauty that is already there. This whole week, you've practiced seeing nature differently. That is a gift. Appreciate it. And today, appreciate each other's discoveries."

Modifications:

- Emerging: Allow students to point to a word on a desk card rather than walking to a posted word.
- Advanced: Ask: "Can you feel two emotions at once today? Which two, and why?"

Activate Prior Knowledge: Story Retelling (8 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"We've spent three days with Nature is an Artist. Before we read one more time, I want to see what YOU remember. In your group, I want you to act out what happened in the book."

Give groups 5 minutes to act out.

"Now here's the big thinking question: What is the ONE most important idea Jennifer Lavallee wants us to remember? [Pause.] Tell your partner, then we'll share. [Central message: Nature is constantly creating art all around us if we look carefully.]"

Science of Reading Mini Lesson: Reading Fluency (12 min)

Educator-Led Instruction

"Fluent readers don't just read words — they make the words FEEL like the story. Imagine reading like a robot: 'Na-ture-paints-with-sun-sets.' [Read flatly.] Boring! Now watch: 'Nature paints with sunsets!' [With awe and wonder.] That's fluency."

Choral Read the Sentence Strip (All Grades):

"Let's all read the sentence on the board together with BIG expression: 'Nature paints with sunsets, carves with water, and weaves with wind.' Again — even MORE feeling!"

Gradual Release by Grade (see table below)

Modifications:

- Emerging: Allow the student to echo one sentence at a time (not a full page). Use a pointer to track each word.
- Advanced: Challenge students to read as though they are a nature documentary narrator — calm, full of wonder, and clear. Can they make the audience feel the awe?

Kindergarten	1st Grade	2nd Grade
• Echo reading: repeat each sentence after teacher with the same expression. Focus: matching voice to the feeling of the page (awe, wonder, surprise).	• Partner reading: take turns reading one page each. Partner gives a 'wonder rating' (1-3 stars) for expression and awe.	• Independent re-read of 2 pages. Self-rate fluency on a 1-3 scale. Practice until rating = 3. Optional: record a voice memo.

Read Aloud / Partner Reading (10 min)

Educator Notes & Script

"One last time with our book — and this time YOU are the voices. I'll read the first 2 pages with a big expression to get us started..."

Read first 2–3 pages with strong prosody as a model. Then transition to echo or partner reading based on grade.

"As you read, listen for our vocabulary words from this week. When you hear one, tap your shoulder!"

Recall the vocabulary words: medium, carve, erosion, pattern, and texture.

Comprehension Check:

"What is the most important thing you will carry with you from Nature is an Artist? Tell your partner in one sentence. Go!"

Call on 3–4 students to share.

STEAM Activity: Mysteries of Nature — Science + Observation + Math (20 min)

Educator Notes & Script

Part 1: Discovery & Prediction:

"Nature is like a sculptor, but instead of using tools, it uses water and wind to change the land. This is called erosion — it's when soil and rocks gradually wear away. Think about how a favorite shirt or pair of pants wears out over time; the land does the same thing!"

- Look & Wonder: Show pictures of famous landmarks like Chimney Rock or the Grand Canyon.
- Ask the students: "How do you think these were formed?"
- Predict: Show the baking pans filled with layered soil, sand, and gravel. "What do you think will happen if we pour water over these 'mountains'?"

Part 2: The Hands-On Experiment:

"Now, we are going to create our own landscapes and see erosion in action! We'll use different materials to see which ones stay strong and which ones wash away."

Experiment Rotations:

- The Waterfall: Pour water from a small cup or watering can over the layered materials.
- The Incline: Tilt the pan at different angles. Ask: "Does the water move faster or slower? Does it carry more soil away when it's steep?"
- The Wind: Use a fan to simulate wind erosion on dry sand and soil.

Circulate and prompt:

- "What do you notice happening to the sand versus the gravel?"
- "Did one pan erode faster than the others?"
- "Did the results match your prediction?"

Part 3: Sculpting & Reflection:

"Now that we've seen how nature breaks things down, let's try to build them up! Use clay or playdough to sculpt your own version of a famous landmark like Toadstool Park."

Class Discussion:

- Which material was the hardest for the water to move?
- What happened to the "land" when we added more water?

Modifications:

- Emerging: Provide a visual "Before and After" worksheet where students can draw the landscape before the water was poured and after. Use a simple word bank for observations: Wash, Stay, Fast, Slow.
- Advanced / Early Finishers: Have students act as "Environmental Engineers." Challenge them to use the gravel or small sticks to build a "barrier" to try and stop the soil from eroding. Have them explain why their design worked or failed.

Closing & Celebration: Gallery of Discoveries (5 min)

Educator Notes & Script	"Nature detectives, this week you've made ephemeral art, created natural paint, explored how erosion works, and read an entire book about the art all around us. You are naturalists, scientists, and artists." "Let's do a final share. Tell me what is one thing from this week that changed the way you see nature? [Take 3–4 responses.]" **Final Wrap-Up:** "Before we go: look at your Check-In form. Draw how you feel right at the end of this unit. Compare it to Day 1. Did your feelings change, just like nature changes everything it touches?" "Every time you go outside from now on, I hope you'll see it the way Jennifer Lavallee does — as a gallery, full of art that nature made just for you. Thank you for being incredible learners this week!"

GRAB AND GO LESSON PACKAGE

Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee

Lesson 1 of 3 — Introducing Nature's Art & Phonological Awareness

⏱ 60 minutes · 🌿 Ephemeral Art (Visual Art + Science + Creative Expression)

📖 BOOK	💡 BIG IDEA	🔤 VOCAB WORD
Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee	Nature creates beautiful art all around us, if we look closely.	Curious: wanting to learn or know more about something

Materials

SUPPLIES	OPTIONAL / GRADE LEVEL SPECIFIC
• Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee • Whiteboard or chart paper + markers • Outdoor access OR nature tray (leaves, sticks, rocks, flowers, pinecones, grass) • Flat outdoor surface OR large piece of butcher/craft paper per student • Pictures of Andy Goldsworthy's land art • TO PRINT: Helix Daily Check-In Form	• **K:** Syllable picture cards (nature images: leaf, flower, butterfly, caterpillar) • **1st:** Counters, coins, or bingo chips — 3 per student (for Elkonin box pushing) • **1st:** Printed Elkonin Box sheets (3 boxes per row) • Small mirrors for mouth movement observation • **2nd:** Mini whiteboards + dry-erase markers OR lined paper • Camera or tablet to photograph student ephemeral art

Pre-Lesson Set-Up

1. Write "Nature is an Artist" on the board. Below it write: "How does nature make art?"
2. Display 2–3 images of Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral land art on the board or printed on cardstock.
3. Set out Helix Check-In Forms and emoji/feeling word cards at each student's spot.
4. Prepare the nature materials tray if going outdoors is not possible (rocks, leaves, sticks, pinecones, flowers, grass clippings).
5. Write today's target syllable words on the board: na-ture, beau-ti-ful, art-ist, wa-ter-fall, but-ter-fly.
6. **1st grade only:** 1st grade only: Draw 3 Elkonin boxes on chart paper. Practice pushing a coin per sound for "leaf" (/l/–/ē/–/f/) and "rock" (/r/–/ɒ/–/k/).

Welcome & Student Check-In (8–10 min)

1. Greet students warmly as they arrive and invite them to pick up a Check-In Form.
2. Give students 2–3 minutes to complete the "How am I feeling?" section. Then invite 3–4 volunteers to share.
3. Play a "Say It" game with today's feeling word, curious:
   - Say: "Say it together, curious! Now whisper curious."
   - Share Definition: Curiosity is a character trait that makes you a better learner. When you are curious, you ask questions and discover things others miss.
   - Say it again: "Show you are curious in your voice and face."
   - Ask: "What is something you have been curious about?" Allow 2–3 students to respond.

Modifications:
Emerging: Provide a printed emoji chart. Allow students to point to their feelings instead of writing.
Advanced: Ask students to share two feelings and describe where they feel them in their body.

Activate Prior Knowledge (7 min)

1. Display or sketch a simple piece of art on the board.
2. Ask: "What is art? Who makes art? Why do people make art?" Take 3–5 responses.
3. Explain that nature makes art too. Option: Show a short video of waves, water, and sand.
4. Turn and tell a partner: "Can you think of something in nature that looks like art?" [Examples: a spiderweb, leaf skeleton, ice crystals, sand patterns, a bird's nest]
5. Introduce the book: Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee and explain that nature will be the artist in this book.

Science of Reading Mini Lesson: Phonological Awareness (10 min)

Before Starting: Determine your grade-level structure. Suggested options include:

- Separate students into grade levels with an adult or student leader
- Complete each activity per grade level as a whole group
- Complete one main activity with the whole group

1. Explain that strong readers listen to the sounds and parts of words.
2. Introduce and model the activity for your grade level (see the leveled activity table below).
3. Complete the grade level or whole group activity.

Modifications:

Emerging: Use a mirror; each jaw drop = one syllable. For Elkonin Boxes, pre-draw the boxes and start with 2-sound words (e.g., "bee").

Advanced: Challenge students to sort their sound-swap words into nature vs. non-nature categories and explain why.

Kindergarten	Syllable Clapping: Clap the beats in nature words. • Model: "na-ture" [clap clap] = 2 beats! "art-ist" [clap clap]. "but-ter-fly" [clap clap clap]. • How many beats is "leaf"? [clap — 1!] Then ask: "How many beats in WATERFALL?" [3!] • After clapping, hold up fingers for each syllable so students have a visual and tactile anchor.
1st Grade	Elkonin Box Push: Model pushing one counter per sound. • "Watch me. The word is 'rock.' [/r/ — push] [/ɒ/ — push] [/k/ — push]. Three sounds, three boxes! Now let's try 'stone' together." • Practice words: leaf (/l/-/ē/-/f/ = 3), rock (/r/-/ɒ/-/k/ = 3), nest (/n/-/ĕ/-/s/-/t/ = 4), seed (/s/-/ē/-/d/ = 3). Always say sounds aloud as you push. This is about sounds, not letters.
2nd Grade	Sound Swap: Start with LEAF. Change /l/ to /b/... BEEF! • Change /n/ in NEST to /b/ — what word? [best!] Change /r/ in ROCK to /s/. [sock!] • Students write two "before → after" word pairs on their whiteboard and share with the class or a partner.

Read Aloud (15 min)

1. Preview the cover: "The title is Nature is an Artist, and the author is Jennifer Lavallee. As we read, be a nature detective! Every time you hear about a way nature makes art, give me a silent thumbs up. Let's count how many we find!"
2. Read the book aloud. Use the following pause points:
   - "Have you ever seen a daisy? How would you finger paint a daisy on paper?"
   - "Have you ever made a collage? What does a collage look like?"
   - "The book says wind is carving this rock. What does carve mean? Let's use the picture clue!" [Point to the arch or carved rock image.]
   - "I heard the word 'caterpillar!' Let's clap the syllables: cat-er-pil-lar. How many? [4!]"
3. After reading, ask: "What is the BIG idea of this book? What is the author trying to tell us?" [Nature creates art everywhere, if we look closely.]

Modifications:

Emerging: Seat near the book. Use turn-and-talk for every question. Provide a sentence frame: "Nature makes art by ___.

Advanced: Ask students to identify the author's purpose — why did Jennifer Lavallee write this book?

STEAM Activity: Ephemeral Art — Visual Art + Science + Creative Expression (20 min)

Part 1: Introduce Andy Goldsworthy

1. Show images of Andy Goldsworthy's land art displayed at the front of the room.
2. Explain: "Andy Goldsworthy creates art outside using only natural materials — leaves, sticks, rocks, ice, and flowers. He photographs his art and then leaves it outside to be changed by wind, rain, and time. That's called ephemeral art — art that doesn't last forever."
3. Ask: "What do you notice about these examples?" Take 2–3 responses.

Part 2: Create Your Own Ephemeral Art

4. Say: "Now YOU are going to be Andy Goldsworthy! Head outside and find natural materials — leaves, sticks, petals, rocks, grass, and pinecones. Then arrange them into a design. Think about patterns, colors, and shapes. There is no wrong way!"
5. If staying indoors, use the nature materials tray. Students arrange on flat paper or the table surface.
6. When finished, take a photo of the art and then allow the students to leave it outside.

Part 3: Draw & Writing

7. Have the students draw their art on a sheet of white paper.
8. Underneath, have the students write: "My nature art was made from ___. The title of the art piece is _____."

Student Example



Modifications:

Emerging: Provide a small sorting mat (3 circles labeled: soft, hard, rough) for students to sort materials before designing.

Advanced / Early Finishers: Challenge students to incorporate 3 specific design principles (rhythm, balance, contrast) and label each in their drawing.

Closing & Celebration (5 min)

1. Invite 3–4 students to hold up their drawing and name one material they used. Celebrate all of the artists.
2. Quick syllable clapping game: "I'll say a nature word, you clap the syllables: PETAL [pet-al, 2]. STONE [stone, 1]. WATERFALL [wa-ter-fall, 3]. You are sound scientists and artists!"
3. Wrap up by asking the students to name one thing in nature they are curious about.

GRAB AND GO LESSON PACKAGE

Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee

Lesson 2 of 3 — Vocabulary in Context & Natural Paint

⏱ 60 minutes · 🌿 Natural Paint (Science + Art + Sensory Exploration)

📖 BOOK	💡 BIG IDEA	🔤 VOCAB WORD
Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee	Nature uses color, texture, and pattern to create art all around us.	Medium, Carve, Erosion, Pattern, Texture

Materials

SUPPLIES	OPTIONAL / GRADE LEVEL SPECIFIC
• Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee • Whiteboard + markers • Collected natural items: berries, beets, spinach/grass, turmeric, coffee grounds, mud • Small bowls or paper cups (one per color source) • Water + small spoons or craft sticks for mixing • White watercolor paper or cardstock (1 sheet per student) • Paintbrushes OR Q-tips OR twigs (for "nature brushes") • TO PRINT: Helix Daily Check-In Form • TO PRINT: Vocabulary word cards: medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture • TO PRINT: Paint prediction sheet	• Smocks or old t-shirts (berries stain!) • Magnifying glasses to observe color changes up close • Simple observation recording sheet (3 columns: material, color expected, color got)

Pre-Lesson Set-Up

1. Write the 5 vocabulary words on chart paper with a blank box next to each: medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture.
2. Prepare natural paint stations: place each natural color source (berries, beet, grass, turmeric, mud) in separate small bowls or cups with a little water and a mixing stick.
3. Distribute paper and brushes/twig-brushes at each seat.
4. Set up the Helix Check-In Forms and emoji cards.
5. Bookmark specific vocabulary pages in Nature is an Artist for shared reading stops.
6. Optional: Prepare a simple observation recording sheet (3 columns: material, color I expected, color I got).

Welcome & Student Check-In (5 min)

1. Greet students warmly.
2. Ask: "What's one thing in nature you think is beautiful? It could be anything — a color, a shape, a sound." Take 3–4 brief responses.
3. Introduce today's feeling word of wonder:
   - Say: "That feeling of being amazed by something."
   - Ask: "What is one thing you have felt wonder looking at?" (The response does not have to be something natural; it can be a robot, toy, etc.)

Modifications:
Emerging: Offer sentence frame: "Something beautiful in nature is ___ because ___."
Advanced: Ask: "Do you think humans can make something as beautiful as nature? Why or why not?"

Activate Prior Knowledge (5 min)

1. Ask students to share what they remember from the book yesterday. Turn and tell a partner before sharing out.

Science of Reading Mini Lesson: Vocabulary in Context (10 min)

Before Starting: Determine your grade-level structure (see options from Lesson 1).

1. Introduce the 5 vocabulary words using the "Word Detective" strategy: display, say together, and use clues in the book to figure out the meaning. Then review the definitions.
2. **MEDIUM:** MEDIUM: In art, a medium is the material an artist uses. Mud, clay, paint, leaves — all mediums! Ask: What was the medium in your ephemeral art from yesterday?
3. **CARVE:** CARVE: To slowly cut or shape something. [Mime carving with your hand.] Wind carves rock. Water carves canyons. What tool do you use to carve a pumpkin?
4. **EROSION:** EROSION: When wind or water slowly wears away rock or soil. Ask: "e-ro-sion" — how many syllables? [3!]
5. **PATTERN:** PATTERN: Something that repeats. [Point to a pattern in the room.] Look for patterns as we read today!
6. **TEXTURE:** TEXTURE: How something feels. [Hold up a rough rock and a smooth leaf.] Bumpy, rough, smooth, soft — these are textures.
7. Introduce the grade level activity (see the leveled activity table below).

Modifications:

Emerging: Point to picture + word. Students say the word aloud and draw a quick sketch of its meaning.
Advanced: Ask students to connect 2 vocabulary words in one sentence: "Erosion can create patterns because..."

Kindergarten	Point to picture + word. Students say the word aloud and draw a quick sketch of its meaning in their notebook.
1st Grade	Students use a sentence frame: "The word ___ means ___ because in the book it shows ___."
2nd Grade	Students write their own sentence using the vocabulary word in a new context, outside of the book. An example is: "My grandpa carves wood and makes trains out of the wood." Students can swap their sentences and read them aloud to one another.

Shared Reading: Full Book (15 min)

1. Say: "Today we're reading the book together. Be a vocabulary detective and give a thumbs up when you hear one of our five words!"
2. Read the book aloud. Use the following shared reading stops:
   - As you read, students give a thumbs up, stop and say the word together. You can also use syllable counting to sound it out together.
   - At the erosion page: "Thumb up if you heard our word! What picture clue tells us what erosion means here?"
   - At the pattern page: "What patterns do you see in this illustration? Describe the pattern to a partner."
   - At the texture page: "Tell me two textures you've felt in nature. Rough? Smooth? Spiky? Silky?"
3. Comprehension Close: "What is the most important word in this whole book, and why? Talk it over with a partner, then share."

Modifications:

Emerging: Partner with a stronger reader. Provide vocabulary cards to hold during reading and hold up when heard.
Advanced: Ask students to connect 2 vocabulary words in one sentence: "Erosion can create patterns because..."

STEAM Activity: Natural Paint — Science + Art + Sensory Exploration (17 min)

Part 1: Predict

1. Say: "In our story, nature uses color everywhere — red berries, green leaves, brown earth. Today you're going to make YOUR OWN paint from natural materials, just like indigenous artists and nature itself!"
2. Before mixing, have students predict what color the items will make on their recording sheet (Ex: berries = red/purple? Turmeric = yellow? Grass = green? Mud = brown?)

Part 2: Mix & Explore

3. Add water to each material and have the students mix.
4. Have students record on their sheet what color the material made and if it matched their prediction. Share the results aloud.

Part 3: Paint

5. Using the paint colors created, have the students paint their own nature scene and add texture and patterns.

Mixing Water with Materials



Sample Painting



Modifications:

Emerging: Pre-label cups with the color name. Focus on just 2 materials. Guide with: "What color do you see? Darker or lighter than you expected?"

Advanced / Early Finishers: Write 2–3 sentences using science vocabulary: "The texture of the mud was ___. When I mixed it with water, I observed ___."

Closing & Celebration (5 min)

1. Have students set their paintings on the desk and allow time for the students to walk around the room and see each other's art.
2. Play a quick vocabulary game: "Point to something in this room that has texture. Now point to something that has a pattern."

GRAB AND GO LESSON PACKAGE

Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee

Lesson 3 of 3 — Fluency, Retelling & Mysteries of Nature

⏱ 60 minutes · 🌿 Mysteries of Nature (Science + Observation + Math)

📖 BOOK	💡 BIG IDEA	🔤 VOCAB WORD
Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee	We can retell stories in our own words and use our senses to explore the natural world like scientists.	Review: medium, carve, erosion, pattern, texture

Materials

SUPPLIES	OPTIONAL / GRADE LEVEL SPECIFIC
• Nature is an Artist by Jennifer Lavallee • Mini whiteboards OR lined paper for fluency practice • Potting soil, play sand, and pea gravel • Baking pans/trays (one per small group) • Small cups, watering cans with rose spouts (for rain effect), and a portable fan (for wind) • Photos of the Grand Canyon, Chimney Rock, Scottsbluff, and Toadstool Geological Park • Plastic tablecloths and paper towels • TO PRINT: Helix Daily Check-In Form • TO PRINT: Text from Nature is an Artist (Fluency Activity) • TO PRINT: Emoji Feeling Words	• Clay or playdough for the landmark sculpting activity

Pre-Lesson Set-Up

1. Set up erosion landscape baking dishes on plastic tablecloths, and pre-fill any water containers.
2. Write the fluency sentence strip on the board: "Nature paints with sunsets, carves with water, and weaves with wind."
3. Post emotion words around the room for the Moving Emotions check-in.

Welcome & Character Check-In: Moving Emotions (5 min)

1. Welcome students and post emotion words around the room.
2. Ask the students to move to the emotion they are feeling.
3. Have the students share with a peer why they are feeling that emotion. Call on a few students to share with the class.

Modifications:
Emerging: Allow students to point to a word on a desk card rather than walking to a posted word.
Advanced: Ask: "Can you feel two emotions at once today? Which two, and why?"

Activate Prior Knowledge: Story Retelling (8 min)

1. Ask the students to recall what art creations nature made in the story.
2. Assign student groups to one of the ways nature created art, and have them act or draw out this creation.
3. Ask big thinking question: "What is the ONE most important idea Jennifer Lavallee wants us to remember?" [Nature is constantly creating art all around us if we look carefully.]

Science of Reading Mini Lesson: Reading Fluency (12 min)

Before Starting: Determine your grade-level structure (see options from Lesson 1).

1. Explain: "Fluent readers don't just read words, they make the words feel like the story. Imagine reading like a robot: 'Na-ture-paints-with-sun-sets.' [Read flatly.] Boring! Now watch: 'Nature paints with sunsets!' [With awe.] That's fluency."
2. Read the sentence strip together: "Nature paints with sunsets, carves with water, and weaves with wind."
3. Read it again, showing feeling and emotion.
4. Complete the grade level fluency activity (see the leveled activity table below).

Modifications:

Emerging: Allow the student to echo one sentence at a time (not a full page). Use a pointer to track each word.

Advanced: Challenge students to read as though they are a nature documentary narrator — calm, full of wonder, and clear.

Kindergarten	Echo reading: teacher reads each sentence, students repeat with the same expression. Focus: matching voice to the feeling of the page (awe, wonder, surprise). Use a pointer to track each word so students associate seeing the word with the sounds.
1st Grade	Partner reading: students take turns reading one page each. Partner gives a "wonder rating" (1–3 stars) for expression and awe.
2nd Grade	Independent re-read of 2 pages. Self-rate fluency on a 1–3 scale. Practice until rating = 3. Optional: record a voice memo of their best read.

Read Aloud / Partner Reading (10 min)

1. Have the class be the readers of Nature is an Artist and decide to:
   - Echo read the entire book
   - Class reads chorally (all together)
   - Students read different pages showing fluency
2. Say: "As you read, listen for our vocabulary words: medium, carve, erosion, pattern, and texture. When you hear one, tap your shoulder!"
3. Comprehension Check: "What is the most important thing you will carry with you from Nature is an Artist?" Call on 3–4 students to share.

STEAM Activity: Mysteries of Nature — Science + Observation + Math (20 min)

Part 1: Discovery & Prediction

1. Define erosion as wind and water changing land.
2. Show pictures of famous landmarks like Chimney Rock, Toadstool Park or the Grand Canyon formed by erosion and explain that wind, water, and natural shifts created these places.

Part 2: The Hands-On Experiment

3. Provide student groups with the baking pans filled with layers of soil, sand, and gravel. Complete the following experiments:

- The Waterfall: Pour water from a small cup or watering can over the layered materials.
- The Incline: Tilt the pan at different angles.
- The Wind: Use a fan to simulate wind erosion on dry sand and soil.

Part 3: Sculpting & Reflection

4. Discuss as a class what the students saw happening. Sample questions include:

- "What do you notice happening to the sand versus the gravel?"
- "Did one pan erode faster than the others?"
- "Did the results match your prediction?"

5. Provide the students with clay or playdough to create their own landmarks.

Example Hands-On



Example Sculpting



Modifications:

Emerging: Provide a visual "Before and After" worksheet where students can draw the landscape before the water was poured and after. Use a simple word bank for observations: Wash, Stay, Fast, Slow.

Advanced / Early Finishers: Have students act as "Environmental Engineers." Challenge them to use the gravel or small sticks to build a "barrier" to try and stop the soil from eroding. Have them explain why their design worked or failed.

Closing & Celebration: Gallery of Discoveries (5 min)

1. Celebrate the work the students did this week.
2. Final share: "Tell me, what is one thing from this week that changed the way you see nature?" Take 3–4 responses.





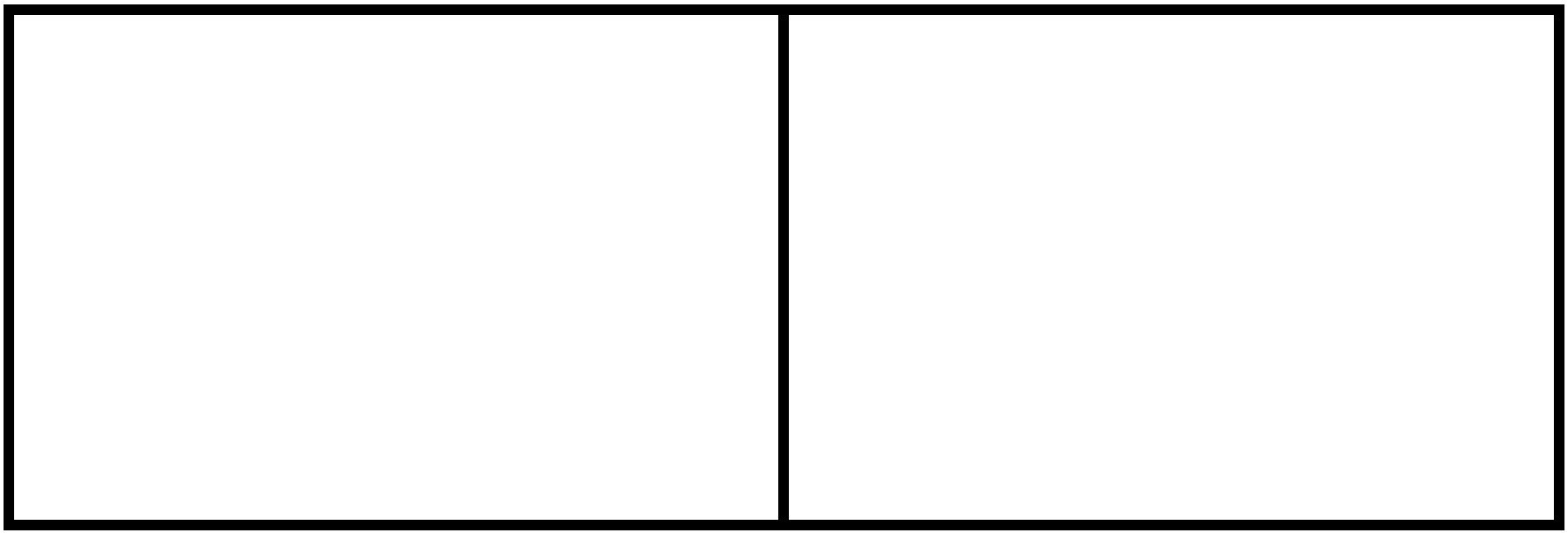


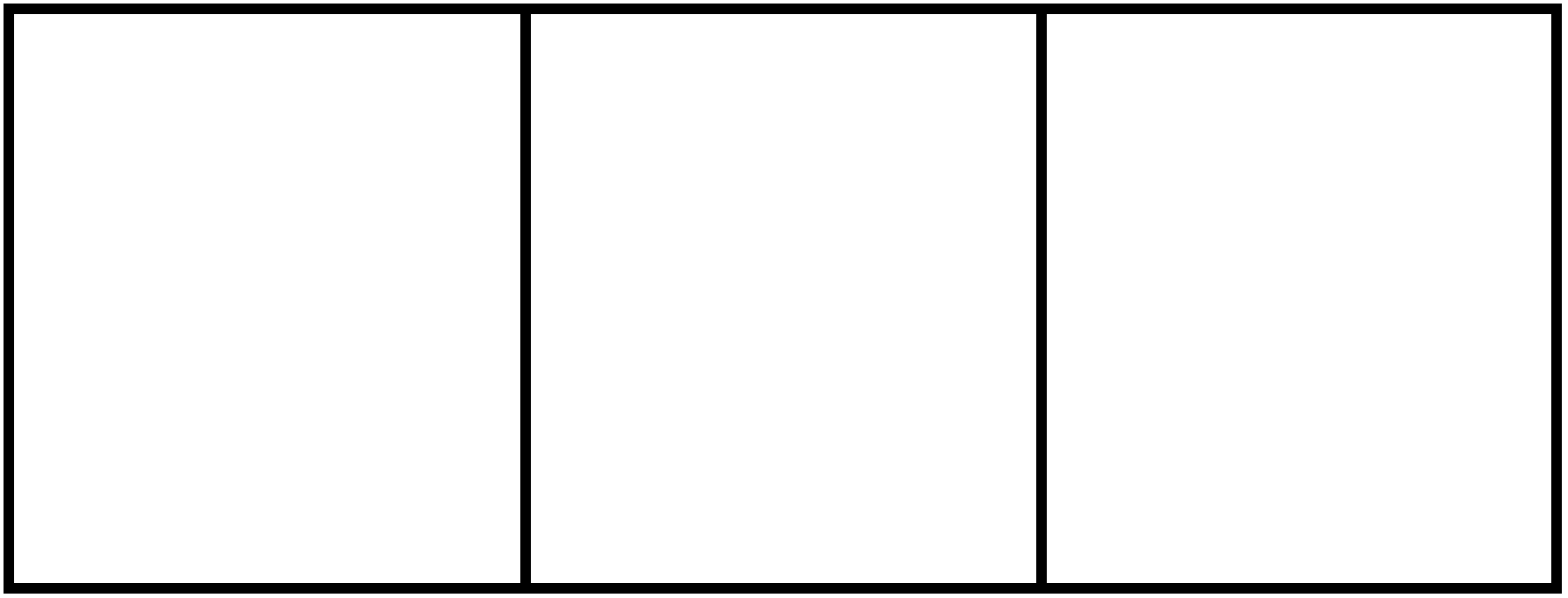






Sound (Elkonin) Box Mats





Happy



Sleepy



Angry



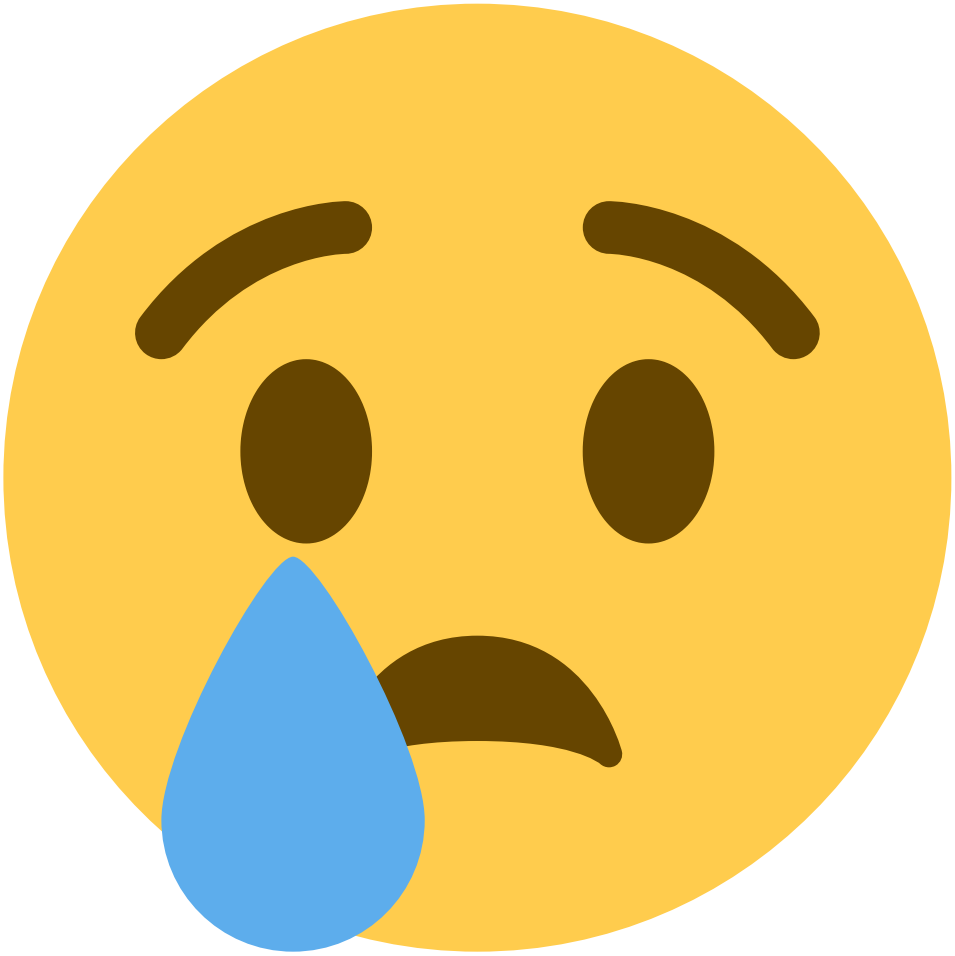
Sick



Nervous



Sad



Scared



Silly



Frustrated



Excited



Calm



Afraid



Confused



Caring



Day of the Week:



Date

What will I do today?

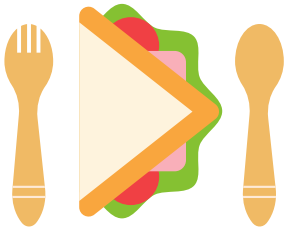
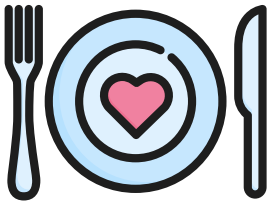
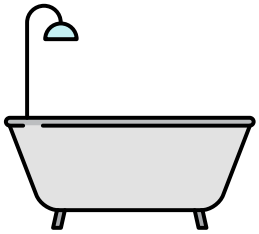
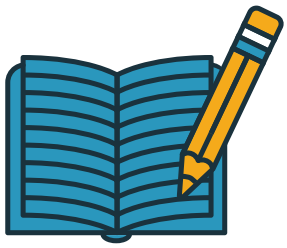
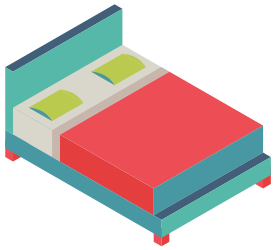
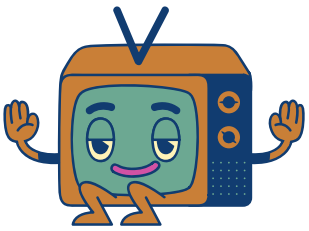
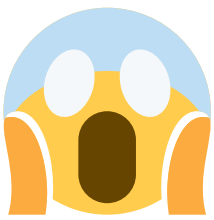
Cut and paste at least 4 pictures of what you will do today. Glue them in the order that you will complete them.

1 2 3 4

How am I feeling?

Cut and paste the feeling faces you are feeling right now.

How am I feeling?

 Brush Teeth	 Eat Breakfast	 Eat Lunch	 Eat Dinner	 Shower or Bath
 Read	 School	 Homework	 Exercise	 Get ready for bed
 Watch TV	 Do Your Chores	 Wake Up	 Play with friends or family	 Relax
 Happy	 Sleepy	 Angry	 Sick	 Nervous
 Sad	 Scared	 Silly	 Frustrated	 Excited

Cut out each of the schedule squares and the feelings and emotions. Use these to complete your daily reflection. Use the blank boxes to create your own!

Nature is an Artist

Nature is an artist, skilled beyond compare. Look at its creations in the water, earth, and air.

We can all be artists. Nature shows us how. So many styles to choose from, let's get started now.

With a splash of color, Nature paints a scene, hills against the sunrise, gold and rose and green.

We finger-paint a picture, dab daisies in the field, thumb-print bees and shaggy trees, a lazy day revealed.

Summer flowers scatter petals all around. Nature makes a fine collage on the grassy ground.

We pick slips of paper, then, one by one by one, we paste them down in order. Our masterpiece is done!

Nature is a sculptor, molding rock and clay. Wind and rain and water carve slowly day by day.

We too make some sculptures, packing sand, and soon, our towers are so tall they seem to reach the moon.

Nature etches artwork waiting to be found, fossilized impressions hidden underground.

We create like Nature by stamping on a sheet, stars and swirls and circles. Press with paint, repeat.



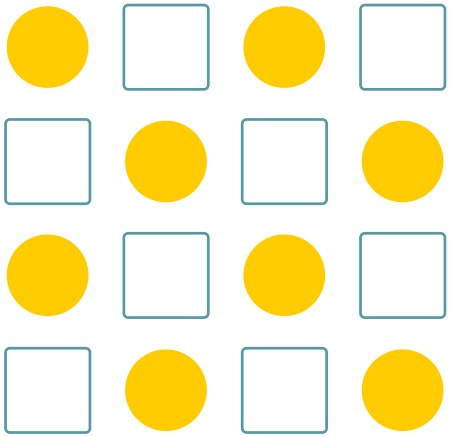
MEDIUM



CARVE



EROSION



PATTERN



TEXTURE

Vocabulary Cards - Nature is an Artist

Paint Predictions



Complete the table as you create your natural paints

Item	Predicted Color	Actual Color



flower

flow · er



butterfly

but · ter · fly



caterpillar

cat · er · pil · lar



leaf

leaf

Syllable cards for Nature is an Artist