



Introduction

Welcome to *Archives Alive: Learning from Landscapes Past, Cultivating Garden Memories for the Future*, an interpretive and educational package intended to enhance Smithsonian Gardens' collections by making them accessible in new ways –both inside and outside the museum, archives, and classroom. Below you will find information about the concepts and goals underlying these activities, as well as suggestions for how they can be used in your home, classroom, or community. As a museum, archives, and group of public gardens, Smithsonian Gardens offers unique opportunities to engage visitors in active and educational ways. These activities are a step toward further realizing those opportunities. We hope that you will find these activities useful in engaging youth with the world around them. We welcome comments and feedback on how to better serve our visitors and community through our programming. Please send your comments to gardens@si.edu.

Conceptual Background: Learning about the Landscapes around You

This educational package is designed under the premise that gardens and landscapes of all types are more than just decoration or backdrop. Rather, they can be participatory learning spaces. As educator and scholar Anne Spirn describes in her book, *The Language of Landscape* (Yale University Press, 1998), creating landscapes is an ongoing dialogue between people, places, and environments, essential to sustaining human life both culturally and environmentally. With this in mind, Smithsonian Gardens' interpretive and educational activities are designed to help foster this conversation among its museum visitors, garden enthusiasts, and community members across the nation.

These activities can be understood as what Jocelyn Dodd, director of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester, describes as a “pathway to inclusion.” These pathways “move our interpretive practice away from the authoritative voice of the specialist or scholar, to an interpretive approach that offers visitors of all ages points of connection, relevance, and cultural ownership.” Using Smithsonian Gardens' collection of historic and contemporary garden images (the Archives of American Gardens) as a starting point, this package is a resource for educators, teachers, and curious minds to explore the meaning of landscapes and gardens right outside their doorways, as well as a way of realizing broader educational goals through multidisciplinary, active, place-based learning. We hope that voices of all ages can become a part of this dialogue. Come join the conversation at Smithsonian Gardens!



Learning Objectives

The objective of these activities is to introduce an appreciation for the role of gardens, landscapes and the environment in everyday life by fostering connections to other disciplines, personal experience, and civic engagement. This kind of experiential learning can empower participants to better recognize and make decisions about the environments in which they live, helping prepare them to make complex decisions in the future. While using Smithsonian Gardens' collections, these activities direct participants to "start where they are" by making connections to the world in which they already have a personal investment (*Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibits*, 174).

Our learning goals (to be aligned with your ideas or standards) are to:

1. Use the resources of Smithsonian Gardens' collections and their own communities to build awareness of their physical surroundings
2. Encourage students to view themselves as producers of knowledge and actively engaged citizens through experiential learning and critical thinking
3. Inspire participants to teach with and learn from the spaces around them
4. Understand gardens and landscapes as participatory learning spaces that are more than just decoration or backdrop
5. Learn about the importance of nature, landscapes, and environment in their everyday lives through subjects such as history, language, art, math and science
6. Use an expanded notion of "literacy" that encourages collaborative and critical thinking, writing, reading and observation to prepare participants to solve problems and challenges in the future
7. Encourage participants to raise questions about their environment
8. Develop skills to think consciously about landscapes, gardens, plants and communities that they can apply to making important decisions about their landscapes and environment in the future

In addition, we hope that this model of hands-on learning about the environment will be a useful alternative for teachers, parents, and community members who may not have the resources to establish projects such as school-yard gardens, or who wish to add another component to their school or community gardening program as an expanded way of thinking about the environment both inside and outside the garden. We hope this package will put gardens into a larger community context to complement the archives and gardens of the Smithsonian Institution.



How to Use these Activities

Each activity is formatted similarly to a lesson plan and can be used “as is,” although we encourage you to amend them to suit your needs. We consider teachers, families, and youth all to be co-participants in these activities, each bringing their own experiences and ideas to the task at hand. Below is a description of what you will find in each lesson.

Introduction: The introduction to each activity provides background information for instructors and/or caregivers presenting the activity. This information can be read aloud to students or presented in whatever way the leader thinks is best for their situation. Each activity interprets images from our collections through contemporary and historical themes that can connect to participants’ experiences and ideas.

Length of activity: estimated time the activity should take.

Age: the approximate age group for whom the activity is designed. This can also vary depending upon interest level; activities can be altered by the instructor to meet the attention of different age groups.

Learning goals: outlines the intended outcomes for participants engaging in a particular activity. These can be used as a guide to fit an activity into your state-specific standards of learning.

National learning standards: Using generic standards, these links can be used to adapt the activity to your state-specific standards of learning and to connect it to ideas, topics, and lessons you have already planned or need to cover.

What you’ll need: A list of materials and worksheets needed to complete the activity. Any necessary worksheets or photographs are attached to the activity.

Vocabulary: a list of key terms relating to the activity. Their definitions are found in the glossary. These can be used as vocabulary words for students to learn or look up themselves as part of the learning process for the activity.

Activity: directions for how to complete the activity. These should be read aloud to participants as they proceed.

“To read and write landscape is to learn and teach: to know the world, to express ideas and to influence others. Landscape, as language, makes thought tangible and imagination possible”

- Anne Spirn *“The Language of Landscape,” 1998*