



Lesson Ideas for [Flowers for Mama](#)

by Deborah Freedman

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FLOWERS FOR MAMA

Dear parents and educators,

*Full disclosure—I do not have any experience or expertise as a teacher or writer of curriculum! The ideas below come from my process and imagination as an author and illustrator, and I hope that they inspire you to follow up your reading of **Flowers for Mama** with one of the hands-on activities here, or one of your own.*

This is a work in progress. I welcome your input.

*Many thanks for sharing my book with children!
Deborah*



Themes

- Art
- Collaboration
- Patience
- Siblings
- Love
- Gift giving

Art

- **Mixed media:** Have children guess the materials and techniques I used to make **Flowers for Mama!**
- I did a *lot* of **experimenting**. How might children come up with their own ways to make flowers? The possibilities are infinite even just with traditional materials, but it's also fun to **explore unconventional materials and tools**—
 - I experimented with **different ways to draw**. I ended up with pencil, watercolor pencil, and crayon, but also tried a burnt stick, and different kinds of sticks dipped into ink.
 - I experimented with **different kinds of paint**—mostly watercolor, tempera, and gouache, exploring their different qualities (thickness, transparency, etc.) and color mixing. Though I ended up using store-bought paint, I did test out making my own paint bases (different combinations of flour, cornstarch, etc.) and mixing them with hues derived from flowers or foods; I also tried recycling old pieces of sidewalk chalk, crushing them and adding water.
 - I played with **brushing and splattering**, with traditional brushes and recycled toothbrushes, and also found objects as brushes—like clusters of pine needles or bundled grass.
 - I collected objects for **printing and stamping** experiments with both paint and stamp pads. In the illustrations I used a fork, a paper drinking straw that I “fringed” at one end, toilet paper tubes... I experimented with bubble wrap, bottle caps, corrugated cardboard, fruits and vegetables... anything that might make interesting patterns or shapes.
 - I collected all kinds of bits and scraps I found around my house for **collaging**. I especially like to **recycle**, like the yellow-napkin poppies in the book, and the paper-plate sun, brown-bag earth, and burlap grass. I even used the netting from a box of farmer’s market blueberries!
 - I made **rubbings** with charcoal and pastels, experimenting with different textures inside and out—like corrugated cardboard, or the tiles in my shower.
 - I experimented with **bubbles**, by adding liquid watercolor to bubble solution—“catching” bubbles in the air with paper, or gently pressing onto bubbles formed by blowing into solution in a bowl or wide-rimmed cup.
- **Flowers have inspired artists throughout history...**
 - Artists have used a simple vase of flowers to explore light, color, technique... Look at some examples and **try painting your own still life**.
 - Learn about how **Georgia O’Keeffe** looked at the world. Then, find a flower—or anything else small that you find beautiful or interesting—and observe it closely. What do you notice? What shapes or details or patterns? Help others see what you see by making a large painting, oil pastel, or collage of your small-something, one that completely fills the frame in the “style” of Georgia O’Keeffe. <https://www.teachkidsart.net/oil-pastel-flowers-inspired-by-georgia-okeeffe/>
 - Explore the tradition of **Chinese brush painting** and paint your own flowers in ink or watercolor, or even try making your own ink or a hanging scroll. I love to paint irises, but

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you can also go a step further and learn about the “Flowers of the Four Seasons” — orchid for spring, lotus for summer, chrysanthemum for autumn, plum blossom for winter.

- Examples of floral motifs and symbols are everywhere—such as floral motifs in ancient Egyptian art and architecture, textiles of India, or tapestries of medieval Europe. Make a blossom-**patterned bas-relief** out of clay. Or with a small piece of burlap and some yarn and buttons, do some **simple stitching**; older children can try learning a few more stitches and decorate a napkin, tee shirt, or even jeans with embroidered flowers.

Art Activity Ideas

- Dress up like Herbie, and make a **flower crown**.
- Create a sidewalk **garden**. With chalk or chalk paint, collaborate on a welcoming garden outside your home, school, library, or bookstore door. Or take the project indoors and make a “Happy Spring” or other banner, adding collaged elements.
- Make a **cyanotype** print with a flower.
- Make a picture of **your state flower**.
- Make **flower “snowflakes”** or flower-decorated **fortunetellers**
- **Invent your own flower**. Give it a name!

Pretend Play

- **Be a kitten.**
 - If you were one of the kittens in the book, which one would you be?
 - Be another kitten. What is your name? What do *you* like to make? How do *you* like to make things?
- **Be a flower!** Strike a flower pose. Which part of your body is the stem? Petals? Leaves?



Reading & Writing

- **Flowers have inspired writers too!**
 - Read some of **Emily Dickinson's** poems inspired by her garden and plants, like "[We should not mind so small a flower](#)," "[Perhaps you'd like to buy a flower?](#)" "[The pedigree of honey](#)," "[To make a prairie](#)," or "[May-flower](#)."
- **Make up your own poem or song or story** about a flower.
- What do you think happens after this book ends? **Write your own sequel!**
 - Tell the story of Oli's flower.
 - What do the kittens make next?

Science & Math

- **Can you identify any of the flowers** in the book?
- **What are the different parts of a flower**, and what are they for?
 - Draw or paint a flower and label its different parts—petal, stem, leaf, seeds, roots.
 - Collect things that might represent a flower's different parts—(I used a green twist die for a stem, paper napkins for petals... you could use rice for seeds, etc). Construct or collage a **recycled flower**.
 - **Invent your own flower**, and label its different parts. Give it a name!
- **Plant a seed** and nurture it, like Oli! Then **observe the life-cycle** of your flower.
 - Make a **flower journal** or calendar and keep day-by-day notes on what you did. Did you water your seed? Put it in the sunshine? When did it germinate? When did it develop a 2nd set of leaves, buds, etc? Sketch your flower's life cycle.
 - **Measure** the flower as it grows and **make a growth chart**.
- Collecting and **pressing or drying flowers** can take as much patience as growing them!
 - Experiment with both, and while you are waiting for your flowers to dry, write down anything you noticed about them when they were outside. Where were they growing? Did they seem to like sun, or shade? Were they attracting bees, butterflies, or birds?
 - **Emily Dickinson** was an avid and educated gardener who collected and pressed plants in an "herbarium". Take a look at [pages from her album](#), and when your flowers are ready, make your own herbarium or a **nature scrapbook** that includes all you've learned.



Suggested reading:

- **[A Gift for Nana](#), Lane Smith**
RH Studio, 2024—*The gently humorous story of a small rabbit’s quest to find the perfect gift for his Nana.*
- **[My Museum](#), Joanne Liu**
Prestel 2017—*A wordless and subtly witty commentary on where visual art comes from, about paying attention with a child’s sense of wonder to the world around us.*
- **[Time to Make Art](#), Jeff Mack**
HH & Co, 2024—*At once engaging and sophisticated, this book subtly asks, “what is art?,” speaking to the wonder children have about making it, through questions they might actually ask. Visual references to real artists across history, identified in backmatter.*
- **[Be a Maker](#), Katey Howes & Elizabet Vuković**
Carolrhoda 2019—*A fun look at creativity, imagination, making a difference, and the pride children can take in the things and world they make.*
- **[The Artist](#), Ed Vere**
Doubleday 2023—*A brave artist shares her creativity with the world, and learns that it’s okay to color outside the lines.*
- **[Head in the Clouds](#), Rocío Araya, Sara Moses (translator)**
Elsewhere Editions 2024—*A joyful and inquisitive book about the vibrant worlds inside our minds.*
- **[Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood](#), Isabel Campoy & Theresa Howell, Rafael López**
HMH 2016—*Based on the true story of the Urban Art Trail in San Diego, California.*
- **[Spaghetti: A Mouse and His Treasure](#), Merrilees Brown**
Tundra 2025—*Themes of creativity, recycling, and family come together in this sweet story.*
- **[Drawn Together](#), Minh Le & Dan Santat**
Little Brown 2018—*A boy and his grandfather communicate through their shared language—drawing.*
- **[Pencil](#), Hye-eun Kim**
TOON Books 2025—*Imaginative illustrations tell a wordless and wondrous story about where an everyday object came from, and what it might give back.*
- **[This is a Poem that Heals Fish](#), Jean-Pierre Siméon & Olivier Tallec**
Enchanted Lion 2007—*When Arthur worries that his fish will die of boredom, his mother suggests he give him a poem. But what is a poem? The answer is... this book.*
- **[How to Write a Poem](#), Kwame Alexander, Deanna Nikaido, Melissa Sweet**
Quill Tree Books 2023—*Words are dancing all around, if we pay attention. Another book that defines poetry poetically and unpretentiously.*

