

From Impression to Observation: A Pollinator Watercolor Collage Inspired by *Bela and Lily*, A Mixed Media Lesson

Grade Levels: 2nd-5th

Time: 45 Minutes

Art Concepts:

- Watercolor wash
- Foreground vs. background
- Observation drawing
- Mixed media collage
- Pollinators

Literacy Connection:

In *Bela and Lily*, two young girls meet at a park, surrounded by flowers, plants, and pollinators. At first, they only have a first impression. As they spend time together, they learn more about one another, and their friendship grows.

This artwork explores a similar idea. The watercolor background is painted as an impression of a grassy field rather than every tiny detail. The leaf and pollinator, however, are observed closely and developed with rich color, texture, and detail. Just as *Bela and Lily* learn more about each other over time, artists discover more when they slow down and look carefully. The more closely we observe, the more we understand.



Objectives

Students will:

- Create a watercolor wash background.
- Use saturated colored pencils and detail for a focal point.
- Observe and draw details from a pollinator reference.
- Create a layered collage composition.
- Understand how artists use different levels of detail to guide a viewer's attention.

Materials

- 9" x 12" watercolor paper or mixed media paper
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Glue stick
- Masking tape
- Watercolor paints (8 color palette works well)*
- Paintbrush

- Water container
- Paper towels
- Colored pencils
- Scrap cardboard backing
- Pollinator reference sheet (ladybug, butterfly, bee)

*To cut time from the lesson, liquid watercolors can replace green, yellow, and red wash

Vocabulary

Saturation: A strong, intense color with lots of pigment.

Watercolor Wash: A watercolor technique that uses more water to create a lighter color.

Foreground: Objects that appear closest to the viewer.

Background: Objects that appear farther away.

Observation: Looking carefully to notice details.

Impression: A general idea or feeling of something rather than every detail.

For the step-by-step video tutorial, visit <https://www.natashakhankazi.com/bela-and-lily>

Introduction (5 Minutes)

Today, we are going to create a mixed media collage inspired by *Bela and Lily*. In the story, Bela and Lily meet at the park, surrounded by flowers, plants, and pollinators. Slowly, they become friends. At first, they only know a little about each other. As they spend time together, they discover more about one another.

Artists learn in a similar way. Sometimes we notice only a general impression of something, and sometimes we look closely and discover details we didn't see at first. In today's artwork, we will paint a soft, impressionistic background and then carefully observe a pollinator such as a ladybug. Using watercolor, collage, and colored pencil, we'll practice looking closely at the small creatures that share our parks and gardens.

Step 1: Prepare the Paper (5 Minutes)

1. Take the 9" x 12" sheet and fold one side over to create a square.
2. Cut along the fold. Students should now have: One square sheet (approximately 9" x 9") and one rectangular strip (approximately 4" x 9")
3. The square will become the background. The rectangle will become the leaf.

Step 2: Draw and Paint the Pollinator and Leaf (10 Minutes)

1. On the rectangular sheet, draw a large leaf shape. Remind students that leaves are organic and do not need perfect symmetry.
2. Choose a pollinator. For this example, use a ladybug. Lightly outline an oval in the middle of the leaf. (Encourage students to work BIG. The bug should fill at least one-third of the leaf.)

3. Make a quarter-sized pool of red paint in your palette; do not use color directly from the pan. Activate the red pan with a few drops of water. Then pick up plenty of color with your brush and mix it into a small puddle before painting. Taking paint directly from the pan (especially with semi-moist paint) will be sticky and not dry.
4. Paint a large red oval for the ladybug body.
5. Next, make a quarter-size pool of green paint in your palette; do not use color directly from the pan. Activate the green pan with a few drops of water. Then pick up plenty of color with your brush and mix it into a small puddle before painting. Taking paint directly from the pan (especially with semi-moist paint) will be sticky and not dry.
6. Paint the leaf green using the watercolor wash. Use brushstrokes to suggest veins and texture. The leaf is close to us. Later, we will add lots of details.
7. Set aside to dry.

Step 3: Create the Background (10 Minutes)

1. Tape the edges of the square paper to create a border. A helpful trick is to stick the tape to clothing first so it loses some of its stickiness.
2. Make more green watercolor wash, this time add a bit more water, to make the green shade lighter than before. Paint the entire background.
3. While the paper is still damp, add touches of: Yellow, Purple, Dark green. Use small dots and quick brushstrokes to suggest flowers, weeds, and patches of grass. Avoid painting individual blades of grass. We are creating an impression of a field. The field is far away. Artists often show distant objects with fewer details.
4. Allow the background to dry.

Step 4: Observe and Add Colored Pencil Details (15 Minutes)

1. Using reference photos, carefully observe the pollinator.

Ask students:

- Are the spots perfectly symmetrical?
 - Where do you see highlights?
 - What colors do you notice besides red?
 - How do the wings, antennae, or legs look?
2. Take your pollinator on a leaf. Use colored pencils to add details to the pollinator and leaf. Encourage students to look more at the reference than at their paper. Artists learn to draw by observing.

Step 5: Cut and Assemble (5 Minutes)

1. Cut out the leaf. Students may add natural imperfections such as insect bites.
2. Remove masking tape from the square background. Pull away from the painting to reduce tearing. But if there are some tears, fix them with a glue stick.
3. Glue the leaf onto the painted background.

4. Press firmly and smooth flat.

Closure (5 Minutes)

Gather students and discuss:

- Which part of your artwork contains the most detail?
- Which part feels more like an impression?
- What did you notice when you looked closely at your pollinator?
- Why do you think artists sometimes show details and sometimes leave them out?

Explain that artists, scientists, and friends all have something in common: The more closely they observe, the more they understand.

Bela and Lily Assessment Rubric

Criteria	4 - Exceeds Expectations	3 - Meets Expectations	2 - Approaching Expectations	1 - Needs Support
Craftsmanship	Artwork is neat, carefully assembled, and shows strong effort.	Artwork is complete and neatly assembled.	Artwork is partially complete or somewhat rushed.	Artwork is incomplete or lacks care.
Watercolor Techniques	Demonstrates clear use of both saturated color and watercolor wash.	Demonstrates use of saturated color and wash.	Demonstrates one technique but not both consistently.	Limited evidence of watercolor techniques.
Observation & Detail	Pollinator and leaf show careful observation and many details.	Pollinator and leaf include observed details.	Some details are included but observation is limited.	Few observed details are included.
Creativity & Composition	Artwork is highly engaging and shows thoughtful artistic choices.	Artwork shows creative choices and balanced composition.	Artwork shows some creative choices.	Artwork needs additional development.

Total Points: ____ /16

National Core Arts Standards

VA:Cr1.1.3a – Elaborate on an imaginative idea.

VA:Cr2.1.3a – Create personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials.

VA:Re7.1.3a – Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.

VA:Re8.1.3a – Interpret art by analyzing use of media and subject matter.

Adaptations

Teachers appreciate knowing how to modify.

Younger Students (K-2)

- Pre-draw leaf templates
- Use larger bug shapes
- Create leaf art with colored pencils or crayons to eliminate drying time

Older Students (4-5)

- Study native pollinators
- Add scientific labels
- Incorporate more detailed observation drawing

About the Artist

This lesson was created by Natasha Khan Kazi, the illustrator (and author) of *Bela and Lily*. In the book, Bela and Lily spend time together in a neighborhood park surrounded by plants, flowers, birds, and pollinators. Natasha used watercolor washes and textures throughout the illustrations to create the impression of grass and outdoor spaces while allowing important details to stand out. The techniques explored in this lesson are inspired by the same artistic choices used in the book.

Natasha Khan Kazi is an award-winning author-illustrator and creative educator. She creates books and learning experiences that celebrate friendship, cultural connections, and the joy of discovery. Her work includes *Moon's Ramadan*, a 2023 School Library Journal Best Book and Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection, along with *Lulu in the Spotlight* and *Bela and Lily*.



Pollinators



Photo References:

<https://gardens.ucr.edu/news/2022/11/18/butterfly-corner> (Tortoiseshell Butterfly)

<https://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/ladybug> (Ladybug)

<https://californiaagnet.com/> (Bumble Bee)