



Theme: Art Connections in Healthcare
Lesson: Sharing Memories With Watercolor Painting
Age Level: All ages - excellent for elderly residents in nursing homes

Learning Objectives:

This art activity provides an opportunity for frail elders in long-term care facilities to share their memories of a place or event, and express themselves through the creation of watercolor paintings.

Materials:

Watercolor paint set with brush
Adaptive paintbrush (with knob handle)
Watercolor paper cut to 4" x 6" (or pre-cut watercolor postcards)
Jar with lid to hold water
Pencil
Oil pastels
Paper towels
Dye-cut silhouette of palm tree landscape cut from black construction paper to apply over watercolor painting (optional)
Clipboard
Tape
Basket with handle to carry all supplies

How to Begin:

1. While accompanied by a member of the staff at the facility (many facilities have Activity Assistants), ask permission of the resident to visit them in their room.
2. Show the resident a small reproduction of a watercolor landscape, such as *The White Rowboat, St. Johns River* by Winslow Homer. Discuss the image with the resident. Ask the resident open or exploratory questions about their feelings and memories that are prompted when viewing the image.
3. Ask questions designed to help the resident recall a place or event in their lives that they can then express in their own watercolor painting. Questions that focus on sensory data such as sight, sound, smell, touch and taste become open or exploratory questions that can provide more detailed information about a memory. Other examples of open questions are:
 - "Tell me about..."
 - "Describe the ...where you grew up in..."
 - "What was it like for you when...?"
 - "How did you...?"

Art Activity:

1. Tell residents that their art production activity will be creating an original watercolor landscape painting of their memory of a favorite place.
2. Insert watercolor paper onto a clipboard, or tape down the corners of the paper onto a table.
3. Demonstrate that to begin, they can simply wash the paper with color. If mobility is an issue, residents can use the adaptive paintbrush to simply paint warm and cool colors to create a sunset. Sometimes painting together with the residents will help them gain confidence, facilitating the creative process.
4. Continue to ask open and exploratory questions about their memories of their favorite place as they begin to express themselves with greater confidence.
5. The painting may be filled in with oil pastels, blending to make colors soft, and adding more pastel to darken or brighten.
6. Optional: After the watercolor painting is complete, a dye-cut silhouette may be taped over the paper. This helps the residents feel that a simple sunset scene of color is especially successful.

Assessment

1. With the resident's permission, display the completed watercolor painting in their room. This allows staff and family members to view their artwork.
2. Encourage residents to comment on why they selected the scene they did, and to describe their memories of the scene to family and friends.
3. Ask residents to reflect on their painting experience. How has the scene changed from their memory of it? What are some of the positive changes that have occurred?
4. If their painting is in the form of a pre-printed postcard, suggest that they record their memory and mail it to a loved one.

Resource: *Generating Community: Intergenerational Partnerships Through the Expressive Arts*, by Susan Perlstein and Jeff Bliss