

PUBLIC ART & ME

A CHILD'S VISION OF PUBLIC ART

SEPTEMBER 2022

reCREATE
place

As part of **ArtworxTO**



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Recreate Place collaborated with *ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art 2021-2022*, and with local schools and artists to create this guide. We designed opportunities for children and young people to share their ideas about what public art means to them and how it can transform their communities. Their insights, their artistic creations, and a wonderful array of teacher- and child-tested activities have inspired this guide. It is designed to help you share an expression of public art on your school grounds or any outdoor public space.

Children are important public art audiences. This guide supports their right to participate in projects that create vibrant and friendly civic spaces.

Recreate Place:

Recreate Place creates age-appropriate experiences for children and youth to impact the designs, plans and decisions affecting their community.

Our approach to child-friendly engagement is:

- Playful and fun
- Healthy and active
- Inclusive and welcoming
- Community building
- Regenerative and climate resilient



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recreate Place acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Recreate Place also acknowledges that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties, signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

Thank you to our collaborators and supporters from ArtworxTO for your belief in creating opportunities for everyone.

Thank you to our collaborating schools: the teachers, principals and creative students at Edgewood Public School, Pierre Laporte Middle School, and West Glen Junior School. Thanks to the incredible collaborating artists Wandy Cheng, Katie Strang, and Christine Dewancker of D&S Projects, and photographer Christine Lim for capturing beautiful images.

We are grateful to our teacher advisors: Anastasia Ali, Ivana Barbieri, Liane Bults, Amy Chan, Megan Donaldson and Tara Paterson Gaspar for their input and creative suggestions to this project.



WHY THIS GUIDE?

Are you interested in engaging with children to explore their landscape and community? This guide helps spark innovative ideas for unused public spaces. We want to help you transform your space into vibrant and well-loved places for children to connect, play and create.



What's in the guide?

- Benefits of engaging children in outdoor public art
- What is child-friendly engagement?
- Activities to get you started and 'set the stage'
 - What is Public Art?
 - Who's in my Community?
 - Let's Talk!
- Creative art projects for your outdoor landscape
 - Tree Expressions
 - Fence Weaving
 - Tree Cookies
 - Wheat Paste Your Walls



CHILDREN AND PUBLIC ART IN OUTDOOR SPACES

There are numerous benefits to working with children outdoors. Research has shown that time in the outdoors supports a greater sense of well-being, builds deep nature connections, supports physical and mental health, and contributes to cognitive and social/emotional development. By making outdoor art with children, you create a powerful prompt to get outside.

Children are naturally creative, curious, and bring a sense of wonder and joy to a place. Art plays an important role in creating vibrant spaces, provoking conversations, and shaping welcoming environments.

It's exciting for children to know that their work connects to other local or national events. We have designed these activities so they can be linked to school celebrations or community festivals. They can also be tied to other national events, such as Nuit Blanche, a festival hosted in communities all across Canada.



Images by Christine Lim

CHILD-FRIENDLY ENGAGEMENT

Child-friendly engagement is a fun and collaborative approach to build community. It involves working closely with children and young people to prioritise their involvement in planning and decision-making. This approach helps adults design and deliver activities that are accessible and appealing.

You can invite meaningful contribution and participation by designing age-appropriate, fun, and interactive experiences. These can be arts-based activities, model making, and neighbourhood mapping. The approach should be responsive to local community needs and interests, inviting a connection to the places where children live, play, and learn.



Treating young people as valued stakeholders has numerous positive impacts:

- Children and youth can build stronger relationships and connections within the wider community, to each other, and to the place itself.
- Children and youth gain the skills and confidence to champion inclusive decision-making practices.
- It can catalyse social change, improving equity, civic engagement, and climate resilience.

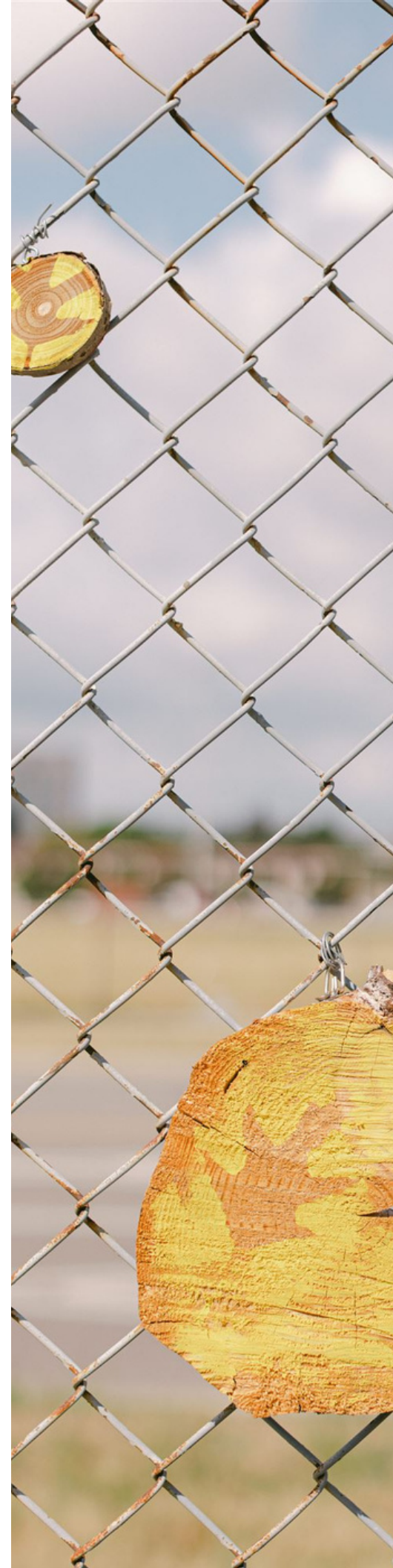
Visit www.recreateplace.ca to download a Child-Friendly Participation poster for your group.

GETTING STARTED

Children and young people are an exciting and thoughtful group of stakeholders. They are naturally creative and enjoy sharing their ideas about building inclusive, joyful, beautiful and sustainable cities. They want to be involved in visioning, learning and sharing with their community. Children's input is crucial for reimagining and creating our public spaces for now and the future.

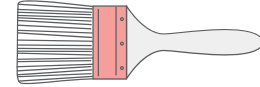
The following **three** activities help to build a general awareness of public art and its impact on transforming a space. It will also build awareness and connections to other community stakeholders.

We encourage you to try out these activities first before jumping into the final art projects in *Let's Create Art Outside*. They will help to build a foundation of knowledge and understanding.



ACTIVITY 1: WHAT IS PUBLIC ART?

Art plays an important role in creating vibrant spaces, provoking conversations, and fostering welcoming environments. A colourful mural in a dark place can make you feel safe and welcome. An unexpected dance performance in a park can open your mind. Art provokes possibilities for our public spaces.



Recreate Place worked with three artists, three schools, six teachers, and over 200 children to document young people's visions for public art. Watch *A Child's Vision of Public Art* video to see examples of temporary art installations that were created on their school grounds.

Steps:

- Share *A Child's Vision of Public Art*, by Recreate Place with students.
<https://recreateplace.ca/resources>
- Clarify the difference between public spaces and private spaces
 - Ask students to list examples of both:
 - Public: Spaces that are free for everyone (examples: parks, streets, libraries, and school yards).
 - Private: Not free for everyone. Must pay for entry or be allowed in (examples: movie theatres, office buildings, houses and homes, some art galleries).
- Share the following video by KOED Art School: *How to Look at Public Art*.
<https://youtu.be/MNO14EzuPM4>
- Share the following video by textile artist Magda Sayeg: *How Yarn Bombing grew into a worldwide movement*. <https://youtu.be/NFDmsNCGcvc>

Discussion:

- Where have you seen/experienced art? How did it make you feel?
- Is art in our community spaces important? Why or why not?
- Who do you think art is usually created for? How can we make art more inclusive?
- What messages or feelings would you like to share through art? What would you like everyone to know about? What matters to you?



Continue exploring these questions as you move through the activities in this guide.

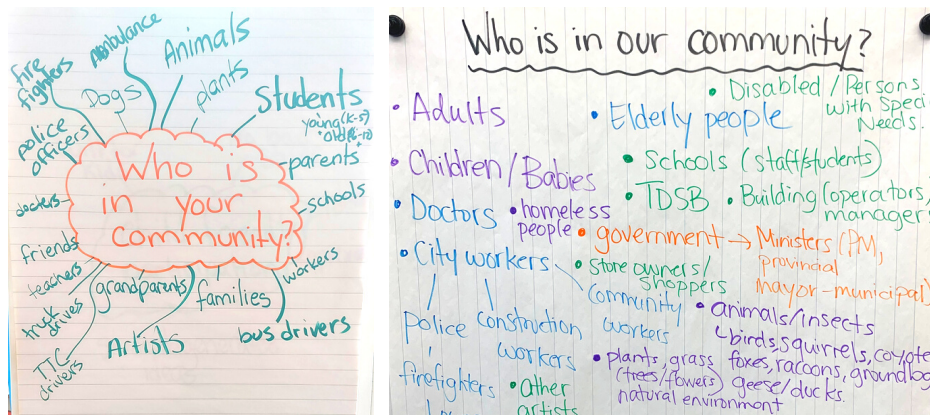
ACTIVITY 2: WHO'S IN MY COMMUNITY?

To get an authentic sense of a place, we must understand everyone who has a stake in it. It is important to inform, consult and collaborate with everyone interested in that space. This will make the process more inclusive and representative of your neighbourhood.

Taking time to be patient and curious will reward you with amazing results. It is wonderful to notice all the people, living beings and different groups who share your community! All the beings (human and otherwise) that you identify are known as 'stakeholders'.

Considering their needs and wants will create creative and important ideas. This will enrich your projects and ensure they better reflect community interests.

The following are examples of different ways to make a Stakeholder Map:



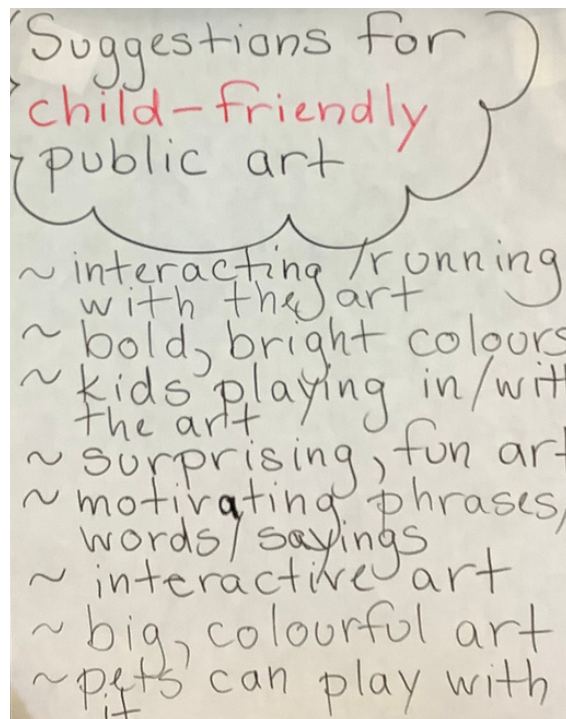
Example created by students from West Glen Junior School.

Mapping Stakeholders

- Begin the activity with a walk exploring your school ground and local community. Consider who will be affected by the creation of an art project there. Encourage students to observe who they see and don't see.
 - What types of businesses, institutions, facilities, and natural features can they see?
 - What is living and cannot move, such as trees, shrubs, or flowers?
 - Do any animals live here? How are they impacted by an art project?
- As a group, record your observations on a large sheet of paper.

Building Empathy

- What should we consider if we're making art with/for our stakeholders?
- Use another large sheet to select 4-6 stakeholders found on the walk. Consider their needs and wants. Use these examples to get started:
 - For a grandparent: Are there places nearby to rest and talk? Are the words large enough for everyone to read?
 - For a child: Is it the right height? Can it be touched? Do kids understand it?
 - For nature: Does it make plants or animals healthy?



Example created by students from West Glen Junior School.

ACTIVITY 3: LET'S TALK!

Children interview classmates and/or family members, building their understanding about what other students and community members want in public art. Children may write down responses or create audio or video recordings to document the experience.

Steps:

- Choose which questions everyone wants to ask.
- Allow children to interview each other for practice.
- Children may then interview a family member, a caregiver or a neighbour.
- Children then share their findings with the class.



Questions for Survey:

1. Is art in our community spaces important? Why or why not?
2. Who do you think art is usually created for?
3. What kind of art do you like?
4. Where have you seen/experienced art? How did it make you feel?
5. Has art ever changed your mood? Has it made you feel happy or frustrated?
6. What kind of art do you want to experience more of?
7. How might artists, adults, and cities create art that excites, engages and draws you in?
8. How do you like to experience art? Do you prefer to stand back and look, or touch, climb on, and play with it?
9. What do you care about that you would be able to express through art? What do you want to share with the world through art? What matters to you?
10. What artwork has made you happy, sad, inspired, or confused, etc?



CREATE ART OUTSIDE

We want children to feel encouraged and empowered to create their own artistic works. They will care more about art if they are part of the creative process. These activities will help children express themselves and connect to their inner artist.

Feel free to modify these activities for your group. Consider them a starting point for your artistic journey!



Image by Recreate Place

ART PROJECT 1

TREE EXPRESSIONS



Using clay and natural materials, create tree faces on your school grounds. Children will consider the wants and needs of the natural environment (their voice as a stakeholder) and imagine what the trees might say! The results will be a series of temporary installations presented throughout the school yard.



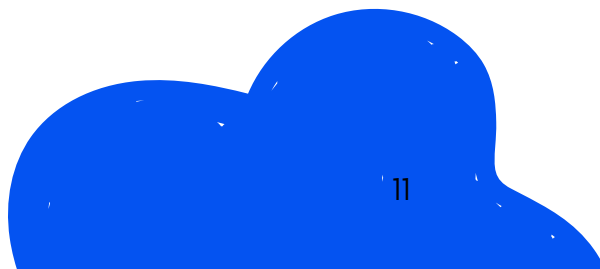
Artwork by students at West Glen Junior School and and Pierre Laporte Middle School.

Materials:

- Clay for each student
- Natural materials such as twigs, leaves, pebbles, flowers, or berries.

Steps:

- Begin outdoors by engaging their senses with a mindfulness activity. Introduce the activity and ask students to think about an emotion that the natural environment might be expressing at this moment.
- Shape and mould the clay to mimic the emotion. Invite students to collect natural materials around them to add to the faces - pinecones, twigs, and dried leaves are great starting points. (Remind them not to disturb anything that is living).
- Once the faces are complete, students can share their creations.
- Over time, watch the faces slowly return to the earth.





Tips:

- If the clay is dry, add a little bit of water.
- The clay should adhere directly to the tree. If not, add a little water to the back of the clay so it becomes sticky.
- Be sure to use only natural materials that will decompose.
- Use leftover clay to create bird nests. Adorn with natural materials found on the school ground. Position nests in the trees where they placed their clay faces. Discuss the role that the tree plays in the school ground's natural environment.



Artwork by students at West Glen Junior School and and Pierre Laporte Middle School.



ART PROJECT 2

FENCE WEAVING



Students will use strips of material to create a vibrant textile installation on a fence. Projects like this can help us rethink how we experience everyday objects such as a fence.

Fences typically keep people or animals in or out. Imagine transforming a fence into something beautiful, a canvas for student expression. Vibrant colours and patterns will help make a place feel welcoming.



Artwork by students at West Glen Junior School.

Materials:

- Colourful recycled fabric cut into 2" strips
- Yarn or string

Instructions:

- Show your group this video by Magda Sayeg: *How Yarn Bombing grew into a worldwide movement.* <https://youtu.be/NFDmsNCGcvc>
- Decide as a group where you might create a weaving project on your school grounds. Place markers where you want to start weaving.
- Demonstrate how to weave the fabric into the fence. A simple over-under pattern works well.
- Distribute the materials and encourage children to begin weaving.
- Ask the group to give the installation a title.
- Share the project with the school.



ART PROJECT 3

TREE COOKIES

Tree cookies are thin wood slices made from fallen trees. Painting on tree cookies is a creative way to add colour, vibrancy, and creative expression to an outdoor landscape. After painting, tie the cookies to a fence. Consider a location where the art can be viewed from both sides.

This activity explores the life cycle of trees and their role in local ecosystems. It offers a hands-on experience of how they support our well-being and connect us to nature.

This activity was developed with Katie Strang and Christine Dewancker from D+S Projects. The artists worked with students at West Glen Junior School to create this nature-based outdoor installation.



Images by Christine Lim

Materials:

- Tree cookie for each student (source through your Facilities team)
- Sandpaper
- Exterior latex paint in various colours
- Paint brushes in different sizes (paint markers if possible)

Instructions:

- Take a site walk with students and your Facilities team to explore the best location for the tree cookies on a fence.
- Using a small piece of sandpaper, students will lightly sand the wood, making it smooth.
- Apply paint on one side. Students can paint pictures, patterns, stripes, or whatever they wish. Let this dry for one day.
- On the other side, write a message for their community using thin brushes or paint markers. Consider writing inspirational quotes, anecdotes, or words that spark a feeling or idea.
- Work with your Facilities team to mount the wood cookies on the fence.



Tips

- Read *The Magic and Mystery of Trees* by Jen Green and Claire McElfatrick with your group to connect their work to ecosystems science.
- For older students, share Suzanne Simard's *Finding the Mother Tree*. Consider sharing videos where Professor Simard explains how trees connect with each other below the ground.



ART PROJECT 4

WHEAT PASTE YOUR WALLS

Artists have used this method for creating temporary artwork on walls and other surfaces for over 100 years. It is a fun and engaging way for students to share their messages and works of art on outdoor walls. Once the works peel away, simply repeat the project and add new content!

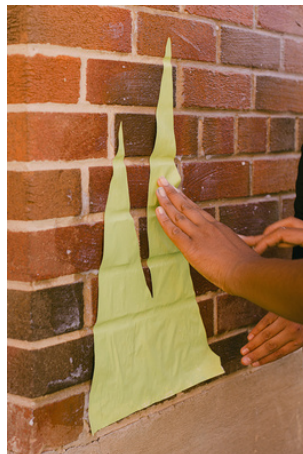
This activity was inspired by artist Wandy Cheng, who worked with students at Edgewood Public School to create a colourful and whimsical outdoor installation.



Images by Christine Lim

Materials:

- Wheat paste ingredients: flour and water.
- Large pot, mixing spoon, a bowl and access to a stovetop.
- Paint brushes for paint and wheat paste
- Paint (outdoor acrylic is ideal)
- 1 Large Sheet of Paper (at least 11" x 17") for each student



Photos by Christine Lim

Instructions:

- Take a site tour to determine which outdoor walls will be your canvas.
- Discuss themes with your students. What is important to your class? Are there topics, themes, or ideas they want their community to know about? Discuss what types of imagery, shapes, and words will help convey their ideas.
- Have students paint colours on large sheets of paper and allow to dry.
- Based on the theme, cut out shapes from the painted paper. Consider using stencils for younger students.



Tip: paint markers work well for adding words to the paper.

Making the wheat paste:

- Use 4 parts water and 1 part flour.
- Boil your water.
- In a separate bowl, mix the flour with enough cold water to create a lump-free goo. Next, pour this mixture into the boiling water.
- Turn heat to low and stir constantly for 20 minutes.
- Remove from heat and stir for another 10 minutes. Wait until cooled to use.
 - Note: If the mixture is not sticky enough, add 3 tablespoons of sugar.
 - Note: there are many different approaches to making wheat paste. Look online for other how to's.
- Bring materials outdoors to your surface. Use a wide paintbrush to add a layer of paste, slightly larger than your image, onto the wall. Press your poster into the paste, gently pushing out any air pockets. Paint another layer over top to seal. Allow to dry.
- Works should peel away over several weeks/months depending on weather.



Tips:

- Decorating a wall protected by an overhang extend the life of the artwork.
- Consider doing touch-ups and additions to your wall and watch it transform over time.



CONCLUSION

Have fun with these activities! Explore, create, and observe how children and art can help transform our public spaces.

We welcome your feedback. Please connect with us at hello@recreateplace.ca.

Feel free to tag us on Instagram @recreateplace or on twitter #RecreatePlace

To learn more visit our website www.recreateplace.ca

