

ARTS • BASED SKILLS & STRATEGIES

• middle school •
• elementary • • high school •

title **Realistic and Abstract Art Exploration**

skill



visual arts

about the strategy

Most abstract artists start with the discipline of realism and then move to abstraction later in their careers. Taking students through the process of copying a realistic picture and then challenging them to reinterpret it in abstract style allows them to experience both the challenges and the integrity of abstract style. Students see that abstract art is a form of symbolic representation like those found in other content areas such as literature or mathematics.

v i s u a l

Comparing and contrasting with guided instruction.

a u d i t o r y

Collaborative discussion and sharing.

k i n e s t h e t i c

The act of drawing through various medium.

instructional steps

objective Students learn how to create abstract expressionist art through abstracting color and shape from a realistic work of art.

materials Reproductions of realistic and abstract style paintings
Pencils and paper (9x12)
Oil pastels or colored pencils
Numbered Post-it Notes
Index cards
Chart Paper
Black Construction Paper

procedure

1. Viewing and Responding

- Display the realistic and abstract pictures, with numbers on post-its for quick reference.
- Students each take an index card, and view the art.
- Students jot down the number of their favorite and least favorite painting on the index card. Ask them to be prepared to discuss the reasons for their choices.
- Facilitate a class discussion to share observations and opinions. Students hold up the painting under discussion when sharing.

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instructional steps

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2. Comparing and Contrasting

- Show an example of a realistic work of art (e.g., Edward Hopper, Lighthouse at Two Lights) and an example of an abstract expressionist painting (e.g., Wassily Kandinsky, Improvisation 31: Sea Battle).
- Facilitate a discussion comparing and contrasting the two styles of paintings. Emphasize the use and purpose of color and shape in abstract expressionist art.
- Where did the abstract expressionist painter get his inspiration? Look at the title of Kandinsky's painting, which provides a clue that the painting is inspired by something realistic.
- Students notice that, even though the style of abstraction often makes those images unrecognizable (because of the exclusion of everything but color and shape), the inspiration for an abstract work of art is often a very specific image.
- Using a "T" chart, the teacher lists the students' comparisons/contrasts under the headings of Realistic Art and Abstract Art.

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3. Creating

- Select a realistic work of art to copy/imitate. Ask the students to create a thick, rich texture, with oil pastels or colored pencils on 9 x 12 paper. Even the color white requires the use of a white oil pastel with some shading.
- Using another piece of 9 x 12 paper and oil pastels or colored pencils, create an abstract expressionist work of art from the oil pastel drawing. The only elements to abstract are color and shape. Eliminate texture, detail and line so that nothing is recognizable other than color and shape.
- Hint. Provide an example of the process, especially for less experienced students.



REALISTIC



ABSTRACT

4. Sharing and Comparing

- Revisit the “T” chart (characteristics of realistic art and abstract art). Use the following discussion prompts:
- Do students still agree with their earlier findings?
- Ask students to reconsider their favorite/least favorite work of art. Have any perceptions changed?
- What was difficult about transforming a realistic work of art into nothing but shape and color?
- Would students feel or look differently at an abstract work of art in the future?
- What can realistic art do that abstract art cannot? What can abstract art do that realistic art cannot? Why would an artist choose to work in one style or the other?

Tableau

instructional steps

procedure

- Determine what makes the tableau visually appealing. Students should note that an effective tableau will incorporate:
 - Variety of action
 - A point of focus
 - Use of different levels
 - Facial expressions
- Repeat the countdown and ask volunteers to improve the tableau by changing the way they use levels, variety, point of focus, and facial expression.
- Critique again. Has the tableau become more effective?

2. Speaking in Role

- Ask volunteers to be ready to speak one sentence in role as their tableau character. They should be able to say exactly what is going through the mind of their character “in the moment” represented by the tableau.
- Speak when tapped on the shoulder.

3. Applying

- List five strong emotions on the board (solicit from students).
 - Love
 - Hate
 - Anger
 - Fear
 - Embarrassment
- Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5. Each group chooses one emotion to portray in a tableau. Remind them of the criteria for an effective tableau. Allow 10 minutes for group work.
- Perform tableaux and critique. Was the emotion portrayed easy to identify? What made each tableau effective? How could each tableau be improved?

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strategy for curricular connections



science



mathematics

- Convert a word problem into a formula. Ask students to compare this process to creating abstract art. Discuss: what are the advantages of the word problem format? the formula format? How does this discussion relate to the discussion about realistic and abstract art?



language arts

- Write a descriptive short story and then create a poem that is an abstraction from the short story. Discuss as for Science and Math above.

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Realistic and Abstract Art Exploration

multiple intelligences target

 visual • spatial

 mathematical • logical

 interpersonal

 bodily • kinesthetic

 intrapersonal

adaptations

to simplify

- See the arts-based strategy, “Reality to Abstract.”

to challenge

- Students create their own composition in oil pastel instead of imitating an original.

special needs

- This activity is accessible to most learners.