

A Community of Shapes and Symbols
K-1st Grade Art Lesson, Two Methods
Jennifer Ogden, 2008



Juane Quick- to- See Smith
Ode to Chief Seattle lithograph 1991

Description:

Students will create negative and positive shapes of plants and animals on cardboard. The shapes will be cut out and printed. Layering and overlapping of shapes may occur, as well as additional line drawings to set off the composition.

Materials:

Pencils, paper, scissors, cardboard suitable for cutting, such as recycled cereal boxes, tempera paint, brayers, cookie sheets or palettes for rolling out paint, Sharpie markers, animal and nature books or magazines.

Background Information:

Juane Quick-to-See Smith was commissioned to create *Ode to Chief Seattle* as a reference to the Pacific Northwest watershed. It reflects an ecosystem, an ancient native homeland, as well as a site for contemporary practices, such as airplane manufacture. Quick-to-See Smith pulls from a variety of ideas that blend together in a fitting tour de force. She honors Suquamish Indian leader,

Chief Seattle who lived from the late 1700s and well into the following century. He rose to leadership in his region, and bore witness to the changes visited upon his people by white settlers, and is attributed to a famous speech in reaction to treaties signed in 1854.

Learning Sparks:

Do a group study of the work called *Ode the Chief Seattle*, by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith from Missoula Art Museum online permanent collection.

1. Have students describe and identify the shapes, colors and textures of the work. Are there any symbols or words in this picture? What do they mean? Are there any colors that symbolize the same thing? Ask what they think the various things in the picture have in common. How are they pulled together visually? Because Quick-to-See Smith's art piece describes a watershed, we see repeated symbols for water. The color blue creates a unifying force for the many plants and animals in this Pacific Northwest habitat dependent upon water. Quick-to-See Smith has shown us a plant and animal community in her picture, where different things share a landscape and are dependent on each other to live.

2. Focus on a particular animal identified by a student. Ask them what makes that animal look a certain way. For example, what makes an elk look like an elk as opposed to a bird or fish? Even though we can only see basic shapes of some of the animals, the details such as horns, hooves, ears, tails and snouts are important and help us identify the animal easily. Having a look at nature magazines can help students see the particular details that describe individual animals.

3. Shapes are important in the artwork created by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Point out main shapes (positive shapes) and the shape around the main shape (negative shape) in the dark oval around the tree for example. Students will be using both kinds of shape.

Steps and Procedures:

Students will:

1. Draw an animal shape on a piece of cardboard and cut the shape out. Encourage students to make additional plant, animal, object or symbol cut-out shapes to support their version of things found in a community.

2. Roll tempera paint out onto the cookie sheet or palette using the brayer. (A squeeze of dish soap makes the paint more viscous and aids in clean up later). Have a few different colors of paint available to use with different

palettes and brayers. Be sure to have an even layer of paint on the palette before rolling it onto the cardboard cut out.

3. Make a print of the animal shape onto a larger ground, such as a board, paper or canvas, repeating the image as desired. Flip the shape, lay it directly onto the larger ground and roll a different color of paint. By rolling the brayer outside the edge of the cardboard cut out, a new negative space can be created.

4. Print more than one composition using this method before deciding which work will lead to the finished product. (There may be more than one successful composition). Allow paint to dry while cleaning up the brayers and palettes.

5. When the artwork is dry, add texture to the piece. If the ground is paper or canvas lay it over something bumpy, such as a heating grate, leaves or a sidewalk. By rubbing crayon or chalk pastel over the surface, a hint of that texture can be added to the composition.

6. Additional information can be added using a black fine-tip permanent marker. Caution students to avoid adding unnecessary facial features, spots or fur texture to animal shapes unless it helps out with the composition. As seen in Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's work, *Ode to Chief Seattle*, the basic shapes are capable of giving just enough information.

Assessment:

Assessment is largely embedded, including visual checks by the instructor to see whether the printing and texture techniques are understood. An overall look at the finished product and a discussion of the "community" portrayed by the artist can aid the student to look at the work through the eyes of instructor or class, and therefore a larger audience.

Alternate Method: Potato Stamp

MAKING A POTATO PRINT:

An alternative to printing cardboard cut outs is making potato stamps. Pressing cookie cutters into a potato sliced lengthwise can make iconic shapes such as trees, hearts, flowers etc. Excess can be removed by trimming up next to the cookie cutter, leaving a strong clear shape.

If a slice of potato, about a half-inch thick, is cut into with a cookie cutter, the positive shape may be discarded leaving the negative shape to be printed as part of the composition.

Additional original shapes may be drawn by the student artist on the surface of the sliced potato half with a pencil and carefully cut by the instructor with a paring knife. A student may try cutting his or her own potato using a plastic picnic knife.

INKPAD:

An inkpad may be made using padded layers of wet paper toweling on a Styrofoam meat tray or paper plate. Add enough tempera paint to the surface to lend a smooth layer of paint for the stamp print process. An alternative method for inking up vegetable stamps is to paint tempera directly onto the surface of the potato with a stiff bristle paintbrush.

Try printing other objects, such as plants, wood scraps, kitchen tools, window screen, etc., in order to introduce different textures into the composition. (Or try the texture rubbing technique after the paint has dried). Remember, the use of texture is to help unify and support the shapes chosen by the artist. The purpose of the black marker is to add detailed symbols, text, or to sharpen certain images.

Good luck and enjoy!

Teacher Resources:

www.missoulaartmuseum.org

(Click on "experience", then "search the collection", search for *Ode to Chief Seattle*, click on descriptive list, as well as image.

Zoo Book Magazine

Wild Outdoor World (W.O.W.) Magazine for Kids