
Monochromatic Abstract Painting



Grade: 4th

Medium: tempera paint

Learning Objective: Students mix white and black paint with a hue to create tints and shades then paint geometric shapes, creating a composition that features contrasting elements for emphasis.

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Elements of Art/Principles of Design

Balance: the arrangement of elements that makes individual parts of a composition appear equally important; an arrangement of the elements to create an equal distribution of visual weight throughout the format or composition.

Color: the visible range of reflected light.

Contrast: a technique that shows differences in the elements of visual arts in an artwork, such as smooth/rough textures, light/dark colors, or thick/thin lines.

Emphasis: the importance assigned to certain objects or areas in an artwork.

Line: the flat path of a dot through space used by artists to control the viewer's eye movement; a long narrow mark or stroke made on or in a surface; a thin mark made by a pencil, pen, or brush.

Shape: a two-dimensional (flat) area enclosed by a line.

Value: the lightness and darkness of a line, shape, or form; a measure of relative lightness and darkness.

Vocabulary Words

Diagonal: angled.

Horizontal: sideways.

Hue: pure color.

Monochrome: 1 hue.

Neutral Colors: black and white.

Shade: hue blended with black.

Tint: hue blended with white.

Tone: gray added to hue.

Vertical: up and down.

Materials & Supplies

- White drawing paper 12"x18"
- Class set of 12" rulers
- Class set of pencils

- Class set (or more) of flat paintbrushes 1"-1.5" wide
- Class set of palettes
- Tempera paint in white, black and one hue (can vary hues by classes which is nice for wall displays)
- Paper towels
- Table covers
- Class set of circle tracing templates (optional but lids work well)
- Examples of completed student work that exhibits good craftsmanship, interesting composition and has something unique about it

Context (History and/or Artists)

Many abstract artists worked with monochromatic color schemes: Josef Albers, Milton Resnick, Ad Reinhardt, Richard Pousette-Dart and Pablo Picasso for example. First presented in 1882 in Paris, monochromatic paintings represented the idea of simplifying elements and stepping away from realistic representation. Not all monochromatic painters used tints and shades but this lesson is to introduce the overall concept.

Advanced Preparation

Cover tables, fill each palette with the chosen hue and white. You will give black out later. Put rulers, pencils and paper in the center of each table group. Brushes are handed out during the use of brush demonstration.

Tips & Tricks

- Don't allow students to add paint to their palettes. An adult volunteer can do this.
- Save the black paint for the last part of the lesson.
- Remind students not to paint wet sections next to wet sections, but to leave space so colors don't smear or bleed.
- Ask students to write names on paper before painting starts, after drawing is finished.
- Don't overload a brush, spread all lumps on the surface smooth before reloading.
- Thoroughly mix tints/shades until no streaks remain in the palette, never on the paper.
- Distribute plenty of paper towels for students to clean brushes, NO WATER.
- When mixing colors: less paint of each portion, less black and more white keeps control (think of black like pepper where a small dash is plenty, white is like salt where more is ok).
- Demonstrate how to pull the brush with the bristles, not against them to keep them aligned.
- Adults should collect pencils, rulers while students paint, to keep supplies clean.

Discussion Points

Students will discuss how straight-line directions are labeled as vertical, horizontal and diagonal. They will discuss how a color's hue is affected by the addition of white and black. They will observe how to properly load a paintbrush and apply paint to a flat surface. They will observe how to properly use a straight edge to make lines that create a composition. They will discuss the importance of a point of emphasis.

Instructions for Lesson

- 1) Instructor will have the definition of monochrome (1 color), hue, tint (hue blended with white), shade (hue blended with black) & neutral colors (black/white) on the whiteboard. She/he will have at least 1 example of a monochromatic painting and ask students to identify the hue used and ask a student to come to the board and point out the tints/shades. Ask students: How does the artist make a tint? A shade? Can you make more than one tint or shade? If so, how? (by adding more black or white). She/he can ask students where their eye goes first in a painting. That is considered the point of emphasis and gives the composition more interest. Contrast of size, color, shape, texture are ways to make one area stand out. This lesson uses color for contrast.
- 2) Demonstrate how to correctly use a ruler so it doesn't slip, and the non-drawing hand never impedes the drawing hand (i.e. righties draw on the right side of the ruler and vice-versa), even if that means turning the paper to make the lines. (Optional: trace a circle first to set up the emphasis).
- 3) Break the composition into 8 to 10 sections using horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines. Announce the name of each direction as you draw it. Choose one section as the point of emphasis. Have students do the same and also write their name on their paper.
- 4) Using the palette (don't pass them out until students have finished drawing) and pass out dry brushes so students can mimic, demonstrate loading the brush with the hue color, wiping one side off on the edge of the palette and filling in the chosen shape. Paint slowly and methodically, beginning with the edges and smooth the lumps before reloading. You may even practice this on scrap paper first.
- 5) Demonstrate adding a small amount of white to a portion of the original hue, scraping from the edge of the paint, mixing until all streaks are gone, then applying to a section. Repeat with additional white paint again and again until 3 to 4 sections are covered. Let students do this, then have them stop to watch the next demonstration (if not all students are finished wait until most of them are).
- 6) Pour a blob of black paint on your palette. Demonstrate how to mix gray (a bit of black added to mostly white). Apply that to a section. Students can choose to add gray (makes a tone) or black to the hue to finish the sections. Each section should be different, no black sections. Remind them to paint separated sections so wet paint doesn't bleed or smear (you can show this mistake on your own painting).
- 7) Demonstrate how to clean the brush with a paper towel: it removes extra paint without excess water. BUT when switching from tint to shade the brush should either be changed for a clean one (adults can provide these as needed) or the student should wash and DRY the brush thoroughly.

- 8) Demonstrate with a clean brush how to paint straight lines over shape borders that are dry. If time is short students can attempt to go over wet areas in order to get the lines painted.
- 9) As they finish you can offer unneeded palettes to those who aren't finished rather than pour more paint. Collect unused paint in one container for future use, or scrape into the garbage. Never wash large amounts of paint down the drain.
- 10) Follow up discussion: ask students to review vocabulary words. Hang best examples on the wall (even wet) to look for points of emphasis, good craftsmanship and interesting design. Say something different about each.

Reflection Point (Assessment of Learning Objectives)

Students draw straight lines with a ruler to form 8-10 sections. Students choose one section and paint it with the hue. Students mix white with the hue in different ratios to fill in approximately half of the sections, and black with the hue in different ratios to fill in the rest. Students use black to outline all sections. Students don't apply streaked or lumpy paint. Students keep colors' integrity by cleaning their brushes between tints and shades. Students will recognize art vocabulary.

References and Attributions

Students at Cougar Ridge Elementary School.

Notes for Educators

21st Century Thinking Skills

Observing, making connections, visualizing, sequencing, comparing/contrasting, finding evidence, cause & effect, evaluating, decision making.

Washington State Learning Standards

(VA:Cr2.1.4): Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches.

(VA:Cr2.2.4): When making works of art, utilize and care for materials, tools, and equipment in a manner that prevents danger to oneself and others.

(VA:Re9.1.4): Apply one set of criteria to evaluate more than one work of art. (Does it have good craftsmanship? Is it interesting? Does it have something unique about it?)

(VA:Cn11.1.4): Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created. (Relate monochromatic choices as they pertain to abstract art).