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Art reflects art

Arts & Activities, March, 2004 by Gary Kohl

An art project for my second grade class that would enhance a unit about light posed a real challenge. Light and shadow was a possibility, however, we had already done that. After some consideration about what light might encompass, I decided that we would try an activity that would focus oil reflection of light and color.

The students had already had many experiences drawing and coloring, but this time they had to think in halves. We were going to create pictures that would only be completed when a mirror was held up beside it.

I wrote the word "symmetry" on the board, and we discussed its meaning. A brainstorming session followed, and the students offered many ideas ranging from butterflies, with their colorfully balanced wings, to cars and faces.

I explained to the class that designs might be fun to make, but an image that would be obviously completed when the missing half appeared would work best. A quick demonstration with a design pattern made the suggestion clear to the whole class. They readily saw that half of a design could still be considered a complete picture, whereas half of a face, utilizing one of their suggestions, needed the mirror to make it a proper picture.

The students were given cardboard that was cut to double the size of the mirrors we would use to complete the pictures. The drawings were first done in pencil. Some of the students drew images that simply doubled in size with the mirrors, so I reminded them of our initial demonstration and explained that a strong central object or focal point drawn in half would be the key to a really interesting picture. Since the first step was only done in pencil, the students were easily able to erase parts and shift designs. They then added interesting penciled backgrounds and foregrounds.

Once the pencil drawings were done, the class enthusiastically shared the oil pastels. The clean half of the image was covered with protective paper to ensure that the pastels did not smudge over. The pastels worked very well, providing strong and rich colors that would also cover over the cardboard background nicely. We briefly reviewed color options like blending and smudging, contrasting and complementary colors, and outlining shapes with black pastel for sharper images.

The children had a hard time stopping at the halfway point, but it is important that the viewer be forced to place the mirror beside the work to complete it. Our objective was to consider reflection, and the activity was successful. It also allowed for some discussion about light and the colors that can be seen in a beam of light.

In hindsight, I realized that the students could have drawn a complete picture that would later be cut in half, but the anticipation of completing it with the mirror gave it a more climactic ending.

This activity could also be expanded to include symmetry in mathematics, but with the large number of students from other classes and even visiting parents picking up the mirrors to see the whole pictures, we had succeeded splendidly and the finished art was beautiful.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

students will ...

- * realize that light can be reflected.
- * consider foreground and background.
- * understand what a focal point is.

- * understand the fraction "1/2."
- * describe complementary and contrasting colors.

MATERIALS

- * Mirrors
- * Strong paper (cut to fit the mirrors)
- * Oil pastels
- * Construction paper to mount artworks

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