

Torn Paper Portraits

Collage and "paint" with pieces of paper.

In art, "value" refers to the light and dark ranges of color. When we view a drawing or painting, the element of value is key to convincing our eyes that a subject has dimension and depth, even though it is created on a flat, 2-D surface. Highlights, shadows, and all the in-between hues indicate that an object extends and recedes in space, has curves, or has dimensional texture.

Values are easiest to observe and repeat when they are placed right before your face.

The medium used in this portrait lesson is paper that has been painted in a small number of values, then torn into small pieces and glued collage-style onto a clear film placed over the top of a grayscale image. By matching up values in the photo to values found in painted paper, students are able to define the portrait in terms of shape and form, rather than line and color. Tearing the paper allows for soft edges and transitions.

While drawing paper is suggested, recycled book and magazine papers may also be used, either painted or not. It's an impressionistic collage that students can really tear into!

GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Each student needs a black and white image. These can be selfies taken with a cell phone or computer camera, or a found image of a favorite person or celebrity. For best results, choose a close up image or crop the image so that it only reveals the facial area and perhaps the head. The smaller facial features are, the more difficult they will be to recreate in ; small pieces of paper.

If possible, use a filter first to make the grayscale, choosing one that keeps several layers of gray. Images will need to be printed onto a letter size, 8-1/2" x 11" piece of paper.

It is recommended that students have a copy of the image to reference. This can be an on-screen image, the original photo, or a second printout.

Process

1. Create a "palette" of grayscale papers. Leave one page white and paint one page black. Next, mix a small amount of black into white and paint one page light gray. Repeat, mixing a little more black in and creating a medium gray sheet. Finally, mix a dark gray and paint that sheet. Keep in mind that acrylic paint will darken slightly as it dries, and aim for shades just a little lighter than needed, especially in the lighter grays. Paint may be "streaky" and not completely mixed — it won't affect the outcome of the portrait. Allow sheets to dry.
2. Tape the portrait image to the work surface and position a clear sheet over it, securing it with tape as well.



Materials (required)

[Blick White Sulphite Drawing Paper](#), 80 lb, 9" x 12", 500 sheet pkg (10209-1013)

[Blickrylic Student Acrylics](#), quarts, Mars Black (00711-2047) and Blockout White (00711-108); share one each across class

[Graphix Dura-Lar Clear Acetate Alternative](#), .003", 9" x 12" pad of 25 sheets (55506-1303)

[Blickrylic Polymer Gloss Medium](#), quart (00711-1027); share one across class

[Blick Scholastic Flat Wash Brush](#), 3/4" wide, short handle (05859-4034); one per student

[Blick Studio Disposable Palette Paper](#), pad of 50 sheets, 9" x 12" (03063-2023); one sheet per student

[Artists Tape](#), 3/4" x 60 yd roll (24124-1034); share two rolls across class

Materials (optional)

Magazine and book pages

Step 1: Paint papers black, white, and three levels of gray with acrylic paint.

Step 2: Over the reference image, on clear film, glue torn pieces of paper to match the values and shapes observed beneath.

Step 3: Continue layering torn papers until the image is covered. Then remove the photo and seal with gloss medium.

Process, continues

3. Begin tearing and attaching shapes directly to the surface of the film. Use glue sparingly to avoid unwanted saturation. Here are some suggestions:

- For best results, start in the eye area. As the film becomes covered by more and more pieces of paper, less light will be able to penetrate to the photo and details will become more difficult to see. Starting with the most complex areas and working towards areas with greater simplicity (such as hair and the background), will make a more successful "painting."
- Observe values and shapes of the eye. In most photos, there may be white area showing and black areas formed by lashes, shadows, and pupils. Try to match the values found in the photo with the closest shade of gray, white, or black.
- Shapes may be layered — for example, tear a piece of white in the shape of the eyeball, then circles torn for iris/pupil area glued on top. Lashes and lids may be layered on top of those shapes.
- Use scissors only if necessary and only in the most detailed areas.



4. Continue matching torn paper shapes to photographic values and gluing them to the film until portrait is complete. Refer to the original photo if too much has been covered to see the reference image beneath. More helpful suggestions:
- Use a variety of shapes and sizes of paper — long and thin pieces, as well as circular and oval pieces.
 - It may be easier to overlap multiple pieces rather than tear the exact shape needed for an area.
 - The rough, white edge of the torn paper adds a dramatic textural effect and a line quality that can be very effective within the piece.
 - Tiny spaces between pieces are not a concern, but try to cover as completely as possible.
 - This project can take multiple sessions to complete — no need to finish it all in one time slot.

5. Once the film is covered and all glue has dried, remove the photo from behind. The back of the collage is a work of art in itself! If desired, remove the portrait from the film so that it can be reused in another project. Brush a clear acrylic coat over the entire piece to make sure that all edges lie flat. Mount pieces on rigid matboard or colored cardstock for a finished look.

Options:

- Use colorful painted papers instead of merely grayscale swatches.
- Incorporate pages from books and magazines. Either paint the pages first, allowing some text to show through or, tear specific words and phrases out and work them into the portrait.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 8: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.