It's Complementary!

Print and paint your way to a dimensional lesson in color

Do you remember the color wheel? Conventional color wisdom says that colors that lie opposite to one another on the wheel, or "complementary colors," are especially pleasing together. There's actually scientific evidence supporting the idea that certain colors look good together. When placed next to each other, they create the strongest contrast and reinforce each other. This concept is widely used in art and design. In painting, the traditional primary–secondary complementary color pairs, described since at least the early 18th century, were red–green, yellow–violet, and blue–orange.

The complementary color of a primary color (red, blue, or yellow) is the color you get by mixing the other two primary colors. So the complementary color of red is green, of blue is orange, and of yellow is purple. An easy way to visualize this is by creating a color triangle.

Paint the three primary colors in the corners of a triangle: red in one corner, yellow in the second, and blue in the third. Then, mix them together to create the secondary colors (orange, green and purple). The first color triangle is attributed to the French painter Eugène Delacroix. One of his notebooks from approximately 1834 includes a drawing of a triangle with the three primaries written in as rouge (red) at the top, jaune (yellow) on the left, and bleu (blue) on the right. Delacroix then added the three secondaries as orange, violet, and vert (green). He adapted the triangle from a color wheel in an oil painting handbook by J.F.L. Mérimée, a painter he knew.

In this lesson plan, we will combine a little color theory with a fun, dimensional print that pops!

GRADES K-8 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Create a color triangle if desired, to teach color theory and mixing.
2. Cut each piece of chipboard into two 12" x 16" pieces.

Process

1. Cut the paper in half. Working with one of the complementary colors, begin by printing, painting, or stamping on the half sheet of paper. The chosen complementary color should be dominant, but accent colors can be used as well. Use rubbing

Materials (required)

Strathmore 500 Series Charcoal Papers, White, 19" x 25" (10703-1001); one per student

Blick Water-Soluble Block Printing Inks, 5 oz (40305-); share at least six colors across class

All-Purpose Chipboard, 22" x 48", 14-ply (13115-2226); share one piece between two students

McGill Punch, 2-1/8"" circle (61825-1008); share five across class

Roylco Rubbing Plate Sets (61112-)

Blick Scholastic Pony Brushes (05865-)

Optional Materials

Compass Cutter (57471-0000)

Amaco Clay Texture Rollers (30704-)

Scratch-Art Economy Foam Brayer, 2-1/2" (40106-1025)

Westcott C-Thru Safety Compass (55645-0000)

Snippy Scissors (57040-)

Process, continued

plates as stamps, texture rollers, or paint designs onto the paper with brushes. A piece of chipboard can be used as an inking plate. Inks can be mixed to create complementary colors, or used as is.

2. On the other half of the paper, use the second (opposing) complementary color as the dominant color and repeat the above process. Allow both sheets to dry.
3. Use a compass to create 6" circles and cut them out with scissors, or trace around a bowl or cup that is 6" across. Older students can use a Compass Cutter on its largest setting to cut six circles out of each sheet of paper. Be sure to place a piece of cardboard on the table to protect it from the compass blade.
4. Using the scraps of paper that are left after cutting, punch 12 2" circles with the punch. Punch six of one color, and six of the other.
5. Cut a 4" square out of chipboard. While holding it in the center of a 6" circle, bend each of the four sides of the circle up. Repeat for all twelve of the 6" circles.
6. Starting on one corner of a piece of 12"x 16" chipboard, glue down one printed square. Glue another square down next to it, using the complementary color. Glue the adjacent sides as well. Continue this way, creating three rows of four squares, being careful to alternate the complementary colors, checkerboard style. In the center of each square, glue a complementary 2" circle.

Step 1: *Print and/or paint designs on two pieces of paper using complementary colors.*

Step 2: *Cut 6" circles and punch 2" circles out of each sheet.*

Step 3: *Using a square template, fold up the four sides of each 6" circle. Glue down, checkerboard style!*

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

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

Presenting

Anchor Standard 5:
Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Connecting

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

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.
K-4 Students describe how different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses..
5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.
K-4 Students explore and understand prospective content for works of art.
5-8 Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks. Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks.