Natural Notan

Make a Notan landscape with the help of vibrantly colored and patterned papers. (art + science)

Notan means lightness/darkness and is pronounced just like it looks (no tan). In Japan, "Notan" is the term used to express the visualization of light and dark as an element of design. In fact, "seeing notan" is the act of identifying patterns of light and dark. The Chinese Yin Yang symbol is a perfect example of a notan design. In the west, we most often use the terms positive and negative space.

Color is not normally considered in a Notan drawing because the value of any dark-colored shape sitting in strong light will still translate to a light value. For example, a dog's fur may be dark brown, but where sunlight hits him, the value is light. What is dark is not light and what is light is not dark. This is the basis of all design and an important guiding principle of art. It seems very simple, but an artist can spend a lifetime 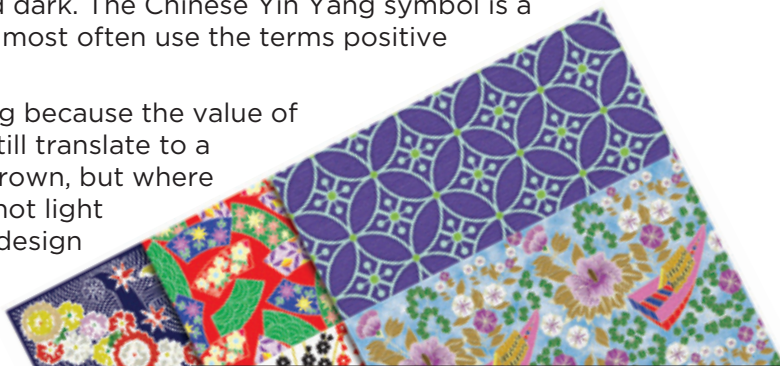exploring the possibilities of light and dark. Building a Notan is a great exercise in composition, and will help develop an eye for negative space, scale, shape, and balance.

For this Notan composition, not only will color be considered, but pattern as well. Patterning can add interesting texture to an otherwise flat design. In creating a Natural Notan using a landscape as inspiration, the composition will be placed on a long rectangle of black paper; however, other options would be to use a square, or even four squares placed in a checkerboard pattern.

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

- Cut 18" x 24" black cardstock in half lengthwise, making two 9" x 24" pieces.
- Distribute sheets of bright and patterned origami papers.

Materials (required)

Roylco Really Big Origami Paper, Package of 30 sheets (63255-1004); share two across class

Hygloss Bright Sheets , Package of 48, 11" x 17" (12906-1009); share one across class

Blick 140 lb Premium Cardstock, Black, 18" x 24" (11408-2009); need one sheet for two students

Snippy Scissors, Pointed (57040-2005); one for each student

Blick White Glue, 4 oz (23882-1004); share six across class

Optional Materials

Fiskars Softgrip Craft Knife (57517-4860)

Sakura Souffle' 3-D Paint Pens (21856-0109)

1.

Process

1. Using a landscape for inspiration, roughly sketch it onto scratch paper or newsprint. The drawing should fit well within a 4" x 19" space. Draw elements from a landscape, seascape, or moonscape. Even a completely imagined landscape will work!

2. Next, choose colored or patterned origami papers that, when combined, will make the base for the Notan landscape. Lay them out horizontally on a table. (These papers can be placed in any way, but should equal 4" x 19" when placed together.)

3. Using scissors and/or a craft knife, cut elements out of the colored/patterned papers. Cut trees, flowers, mountains, swirling water, and clouds for a landscape-themed design. Alternately, cut fish, shells, sea creatures, coral, or lapping waves for a seascape-themed design. You get the picture! Keep all the pieces — even the smallest ones.

4. Glue the papers that the pieces were cut from onto the black background paper, leaving a 2-1/2" border on all sides. Flip all the cut-out elements to the top and sides, creating a mirror image. Glue all elements in place.

Step 1: Select and place bright and decorative papers for the Notan landscape.

Step 2: Using scissors and/or a craft knife, cut various shapes out of the landscape.

Options

Make a checkerboard Notan by placing four equal-sized squares together.

Use an organic shape as the base for a Notan, or start with a circle or an oval.

Use paint pens to add further embellishment, being sure to mirror their placement.
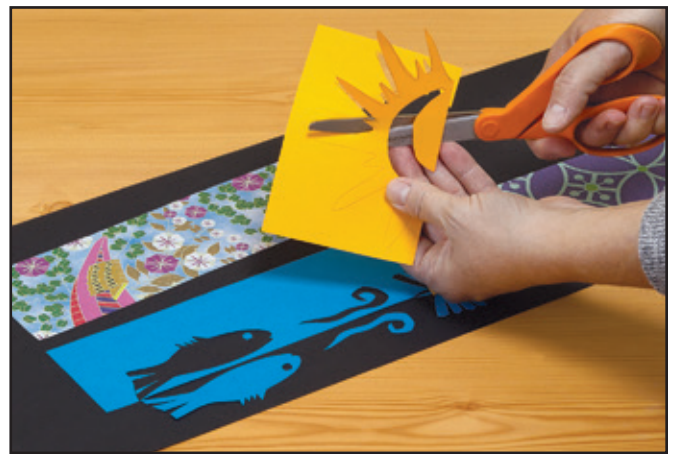
National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Connecting

Anchor Standard #11

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Step 3: Flip shapes out and up to create a mirror image. Glue onto a black background.