Expressive Hand Portraits

Inspired by the Photography of Dorothea Lange





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Sample the variety of emotions expressed by the human hand with the help of a simple drawing tool.

Photographer Dorothea Lange captured some of most iconic images that documented the struggles of the Great Depression and World War II eras. With her camera, she told the stories of marginalized and displaced persons, their surroundings, and body language—often sharing more than their faces.

Through Lange's lens, deep emotions were often expressed by a subject's hands. Their appearance and positioning showed the physical effects of the subject's trials, and also the worry and despondency they faced. A migrant mother supporting her tired head, a man clasping his hands while waiting in a bread line, children in internment with their hands over their hearts—through photography, Lange shared their stories with the world.

Experts who study non-verbal communication and body language have focused on the ability of hand gestures to enhance communication and comprehension, bridging language gaps and increasing sensitivity to others' emotions.

In this lesson, students use their own hands to portray expression and describe what is communicated through hand gestures. Using a simple viewer created with clear film, the contours of a hand can be followed with a dry erase marker, transferred to tracing paper, then wiped clean and reused. We provide a series of prompts to get started. Hand expressions are arranged in a collage and words can be added as elements for further storytelling.

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



Materials (required)

Pre-Cut Mat Frames, pkg of 12, opening size 9" x 12" (17204-1004); share two across class

Grafix Dura-Lar Clear Acetate Alternative, 9" x 12" x .003", pad of 25 sheets (55506-1303); share one a+cross class

Expo Dry Erase Low Odor Marker, black, fine tip set of 36 (52922-1279); share one across class

Blick Studio Tracing Paper Pad, 11" x 14", 50 sheets (10609-3005); share one across class

Blick White Sulphite Drawing Paper, 12" x 18", 80-lb pkg of 100 (10209-1079); share one across class

Blick Studio Artists' Colored Pencils, Portrait set of 24 (22063-1249); share six sets across class or select individual colors needed (22063-) Magic Stix Washable Triangular Markers, set of 12, Global Skin Tones (22389-1112); share 5-6 steps across class

Blick Essentials Glue Stick, 0.70 oz (23895-1047); share one between two students

Optional Materials

Sharpie Ultra-Fine Point Markers, black, pkg of 5 (21315-2015)

Blick Aluminum Non-Slip Ruler, 12" (56014-1012)





Preparation

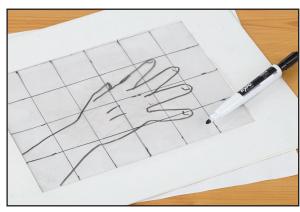
- Make a drawing grid. This is a useful composition tool that can be used over and over for drawing and painting projects. Holding the grid up to a scene or still life or placing it over a photo can help determine the placement of objects on paper or canvas.
- 2. Draw a grid on one side of a piece of clear film using a ruler and a permanent marker. For a 9" x 12" piece, make lines at 2" intervals along the long (12") edges. Lines may be spaced 2.25" apart along the short (9") edge.
- 3. Use masking tape to secure the film to the back side of a pre-cut mat frame, centering it in the opening. View through the front side.

Process

- Secure drawing grid to keep it in place while drawing. It can be propped by various items or taped to the table surface on one of the long sides. Lift away from the table like a hinge, then place hand behind the drawing grid, filling the frame area. As an option, work with a partner and have one person pose their hand while the other person draws it.
- 2. Pose the hand, representing a gesture or emotional response. Use the following list of prompts for ideas:
 - Anger Relaxation
- Defensiveness

- Fright
- responding to mas
- Responding to Music Seeking Attention
- Tension
- Holding an object
- Seeking Help

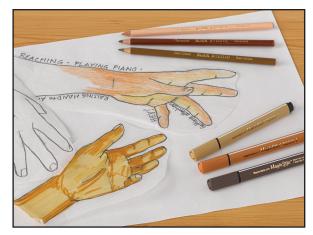
- Surprise
- Showing approval
- Making Accusation
- 3. Use a dry-erase marker to trace the contour of the hand, then remove the hand and place the drawing grid flat against the table.



Step 1: Make a drawing grid, then position hand in viewer and trace outline with a dryerase marker.



Step 2: Transfer drawing on tracing paper. Erase viewer and reposition hand in a new, expressive pose. Repeat tracing.



Step 3: Form a collage of expressive hand drawings on paper. Add color for skin tones.

As an option, define each hand pose with words that describe emotions, responses, and actions that might be represented.

Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/squish-mache to access a product bundle for your convenience.

Process, continued

- 3. Place tracing paper over the grid and transfer the contour drawing by tracing it with a pencil.
- 4. Wipe the dry-erase drawing from the grid using a dry eraser or paper towel.
- 5. Repeat the above process steps until several hand poses have been captured.
- 6. Cut hand poses from tracing paper and arrange in a collage on a sheet of heavy paper or board. Use a glue stick to secure in place.
- 7. Add color using colored pencils or markers with a selection of shades representing common skin tones.

Options

- Surround each hand pose with words and phrases that describe the emotions behind the pose, the situation or that it may be reacting to, and thoughts that may be processed by the brain as the hand responds.
- If a range of skin tones are not available, use fantasy colors, designs, or patterns to decorate hands and enhance the emotional quality of the poses.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas

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

Connecting

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

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cutural, and historical context to deepen understanding

