

Colorfield Field Sketchbook

Make your own sketchpad and
design a canvas wrap cover

The term "Color Field" is used to describe a style of abstract painting that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. Characterized by large canvas "fields," this movement emphasized flat color (or lack of it) as subject matter. Advancements in the manufacturing of acrylic paints opened the door to new ways that an artist could successfully apply color to canvas and other surfaces.

"Stain painting" was a very successful technique employed by Color Field artists such as Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis. Earlier experiments using diluted oil colors poured out onto raw, unprimed canvas had resulted in premature deterioration. Acrylics, however, allowed Color Field artists the freedom to create fluid "veils" of color that remained vibrant and permanent.

This lesson plan begins with an easy process for padding paper into a sketchbook, then shows students how to create a stain-painted canvas cover. They can personalize their sketchbooks by designing how the canvas will wrap around the pad as well as by creating tool holders and a means of closure.

GRADES 3-12 *Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*

Preparation

1. Although paper pads can be any size, for this process, cut paper into 6" x 9" pieces using a paper trimmer.
2. Cut chipboard into 6" x 9" pieces using a paper trimmer.
3. Cut canvas into 7" x 20" pieces (one canvas roll will make 35 pieces).
4. Cover tables with plastic for protection.

Process — Making the Sketchbook

1. Stack paper as uniformly as possible on top of a chipboard back. Determine which edge will be bound and clip together with binder clips approximately 1/4" from the edge.



Materials

Blick[®] White Sulphite Drawing Paper, 9" x 12", 60-lb, 500-sheet ream (10209-1023); share one ream among class

Fredrix[®] Style 568 Medium Weight Cotton Canvas Roll, 52" x 3-yds, unprimed (07303-1352); share one roll among class

Acco[®] Binder Clips, 1-1/4", box of 12 (57330-4114); need 2 clips per student

Chipboard, double thick, 22" x 28" (13115-2232); share one between nine students

Lineco[®] Pad Compound, 12-oz (12752-1012); share one bottle among class

Blick[®] Studio Acrylics, assorted colors, 4-oz (01637-); share at least 3 colors among class

Holbein[®] Atomizer Bottle, 2-oz (02912-1003); share 4-5 across class

Richeson[®] Paint Cups, pkg of 100 (03317-0100); need at least 3 per student

Delta[®] Sobo[®] Craft and Fabric Glue, 4-oz (23820-1004); share 4-5 across class

Optional Materials:

Creativity Street[®] Embroidery Floss, set of 24 skeins (63100-1009)

Craft Button Assortment, 1-lb (61495-1001)

Darice[®] Hemp Cord, earthy colors, 120-ft (62986-2030)

2. Brush Lineco Pad Compound liberally over the edge of the paper pad and chipboard, covering 1/8" over the front and back sides of the pad. Allow to dry and repeat.
3. When compound is dry, remove clips and test the binding by flipping the pages.

Process for creating sketchbook:



Step 1: Cut paper and chipboard to size, stack neatly and secure with clips.



Step 2: Brush Pad Compound along one edge of the pad and 1/8" over the front and back sides.



Step 3: Remove clips and test binding.

Process for creating canvas cover:



Step 1: Dilute acrylic paints with water for staining. Mist the surface of the canvas with water or dampen with a sponge.



Step 2: Pour paint onto the canvas, allowing it to flow naturally. Layer colors and mist with more water to create expressive effects.



Step 3: Glue cardboard back of sketchbook directly onto canvas. Design details such as tool holder pockets and decorative edges.

Process, continued

Process — Making the Canvas Wrap

1. Place paper towels beneath the canvas. Squeeze a portion of paint about the size of a quarter into a paint cup. Add water and mix with a brush until smooth. The consistency should be like cream, although varied thicknesses of paint may be desirable to produce a variety of stains. For example, very thin mixtures of paint will spread more quickly into the canvas fibers and will be a lighter hue when dry. Mix at least three colors.
2. Lightly spray water onto one-third of the canvas and gently pour color directly from the cup. Experiment by pouring a second color directly into the first or by spraying more water onto the paint (or onto the canvas near the paint). Try lifting the side of the canvas and allowing the paint to run or leaving portions of the canvas dry and unpainted.
3. Continue to stain the entire canvas. Allow it to dry, turn it over and repeat on the back side.
4. Once the canvas is fully stained, determine how it will wrap. Glue the back of the sketchpad onto the canvas.
5. Design a means for the canvas wrap to close around the pad with string, buttons, Velcro®, or snaps. One end of the wrap can be rolled and glued to make a tool holder (secure it in place with a paper clip while drying).



Options

1. Stitch the edges of the canvas wrap with an embroidery needle and floss and/or embellish it with beads and buttons.
2. Instead of staining it, paint the canvas wrap with acrylic colors.

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
- 9-12** Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

Content Standard #5 — Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

- K-4** Students understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art
- 5-8** Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
- 9-12** Students describe meanings of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created and how they relate to historical and cultural contexts.

