

Letters + Numbers = ART

A painted book in the style of Robert Indiana

(art history; art + literature)

“With the right words you can change the world,”
from *Charlotte's Web*,
copyright 1952 by E. B. White



Almost everyone recognizes Robert Indiana's "Love" paintings and sculptures, with stacked letters and tilted "O". Designed in 1965 for a holiday card, it immediately became a pop culture icon. His artwork is both simple and complex at the same time, using stencils, color and few basic shapes to make stark, visual statements similar to road signs.

Stencilling is the most basic form of lettering, simplifying and mainstreaming letters and numbers, removing any style or emotion. They represent nothing more than what they are - words. Carefully chosen words can be powerful.

This lesson plan challenges students to choose eight ideas that can be stated with one simple word, then assemble them into a painted book.

Grade Levels 5-12

Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View images of Robert Indiana's paintings and prints. Online, one good source is:
www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/indiana_robert.html
2. Review the six principles of design (contrast, movement, rhythm, unity, pattern and balance). This lesson is a good teaching tool for these principles. For example, contrast and unity can be explored in color choices, rhythm and pattern in the way the words are structured and laid out on the page, balance as the book is considered a whole piece made up of individual components.

Process

1. Fold 5" x 20" bristol board piece in half. Because of the rigidity of the bristol, you will need to bend the paper against a ruler to start the fold, then use a modeling



Materials

Claybord Smooth 5" x 5" (14915-2005), 4-pack, need 2 panels per student

Blick Matte Acrylic Paint (00727-), assorted colors, distribute throughout class

C-Thru® Stencil Lettering Guides (55440-), assorted sizes, distribute throughout class

Blick Scholastic Wonder White Round, size 4 (05857-1004) one per student

Blick Scholastic Golden Taklon Flat, size 1/2" (05859-4012), one per student

Strathmore 500 Series Bristol Board Sheets Plate Surface, 3-ply (13309-1053), cut to 5"W x 20"L pieces to get 6 per sheet, need one piece per student

Blick Multi-Purpose Glue (23872-1065), distribute throughout class

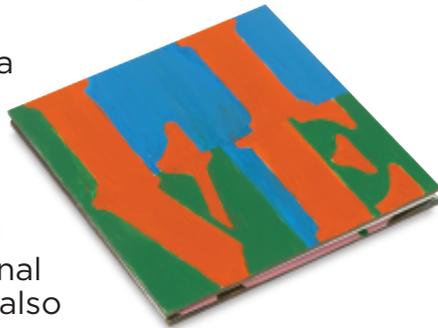
Student Modeling Tools (30361-1009), distribute throughout class

Blick 12" Wooden Ruler (55425-1012) one per student

School Pencil Compass (55491-1055) one per student

Process, continued

- tool to burnish flat. Fold each side into the center (gate fold) and burnish folds down. You will have 4 panels. Tuck the first and last panels in.
2. Squeeze a spiral of glue onto one of the two middle panels of the paper. Use flat brush to spread the glue evenly out to the edges. Place Claybord, uncoated side down, onto the glue and align the edges of the bristol evenly. Repeat on the reverse side.
 3. While the glue dries, make a list of words and numbers that will be used on each of the 8 pages. Limit your selection to verbs (like Indiana's sign-like instructions: Eat, Love, Dream, Die) and significant numerals. Don't use proper nouns.
 4. Use a pencil and stencils to letter each page. Words can be stacked (as in "Love"), placed diagonally and follow the outline of circles and shapes. A ruler and compass may also be helpful.
 5. Add color, one page at a time. Blick Matte Acrylics are a perfect medium to use because they are very opaque, fast-drying and available in non-traditional design colors. You may also use ink, marker, gouache, screenprinting inks and colored pencil on Claybord Smooth and on the bristol board, if these mediums are more suitable.
 6. When pages are dry, close the book and allow the weight of the Claybord to press the bristol board. Display three-dimensionally or flat. For an intriguing classroom installation, open each book into a square shape and stack together, building-block style.



Options:

1. Use the same process to make a watercolor book (example at right). Use [Claybord Textured](#) (14912-2005) for the cover and create the pages with [Blick Studio® Watercolor Paper](#) by [Fabriano®](#) (10080-1022).

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National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experience and ideas.

9-12 Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques and processes they use.

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas

5-8 Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

9-12 Students evaluate and defend the validity of sources for content and the manner in which subject matter, symbols, and images are used in the students' works and in significant works by others

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

5-8 Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry

9-12 Students identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implications of various purposes, and justify their analyses of purposes in particular works



