

## Hang in Balance

Explore balance in everyday life through kinetic sculpture inspired by Alexander Calder.

(art + social studies) (art + science)

In visual art balance refers to how all of the elements in a composition, such as line, shape, color, value, space, form, and texture, relate to each other to create a sense of visual balance and harmony. In sculpture balance is controlled by gravity in a very real way, and it is easy to see if something is balanced or not; if the sculpture falls over, it is not balanced. In the mobile sculptures of Alexander Calder, balance can be taken quite literally in this way. At a time when sculpture was focused on solid objects with weight and mass, he suspended forms with thin wire, balancing and counter balancing them on a fulcrum, as if they were each part of a floating teeter-totter or seesaw.

There is also a balance in life. We are all supported by the community in which we live. People in various roles, as well as activities, help keep us moving and feeling balanced every day.

This lesson explores balance in terms of kinetic sculpture while representing and acknowledging those who help bring balance to everyday life.

With a little bit of sculpture wire and a special semi-transparent flexible paint made by Pebeo called Arti'Stick, it is easy to create your own mobile that explores balance and harmony in both art and life. Each hanging element represents aspects of balance in daily life. Students are invited to think about who and what in their community keeps everything working and in balance. These could be institutions, people, activities, or anything positive in their life that they would like to acknowledge!

**GRADES 5-12** Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

### Preparation

1. Show various images of Calder's mobiles and discuss balance in terms of kinetic art.
2. Connect to balance in life — what keeps us balanced, feeling safe, and happy? Some examples would be school, home, friends, family, teachers, coaches, etc. Invite students to make their own list.
3. Cut various lengths of the 14 gauge armature wire, ranging from 6" to 16" for the arms of the sculpture and cut the 9 gauge wire to approximately 24" for the main support or backbone of the sculpture.



### Materials (required)

[Blick Armature and Sculpture Wire](#), 9 gauge, 50 ft (33400-1950); share one across class

[Blick Armature and Sculpture Wire](#), 14 gauge, 350 ft (33400-1435); share one across class

[Arcor Brass Wire Spool](#), 28 gauge, 75 ft (33416-1028); share two across class

[Pebeo Arti'Stick Window Color](#), asst. colors, 75 ml (00700-); share 8-12 colors across class

[Aleene's Clear Gel Tacky Glue](#), 4 oz (23884-1204); share five across class

[Grafix Clear Acetate Sheets](#), .003", 20" x 25" (55501-1101); cut six sheets to to 10" x 12.5"

[All-Purpose Chipboard](#), 14 ply, 22" x 28" (13115-2222); cut six sheets to 14" x 11"

### Optional Materials

[Blick Copper Wire](#), asst. gauges (33415-)

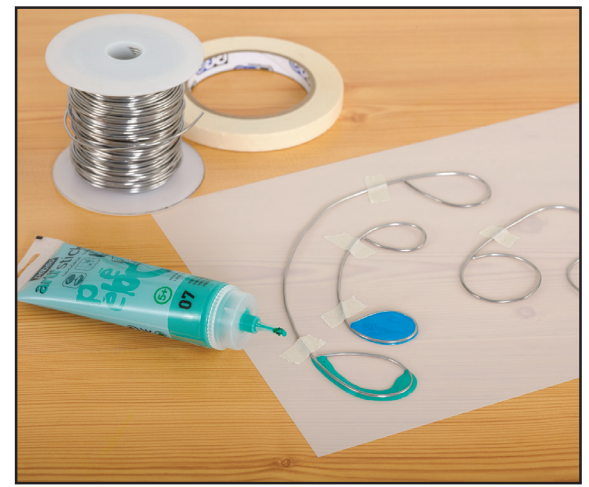
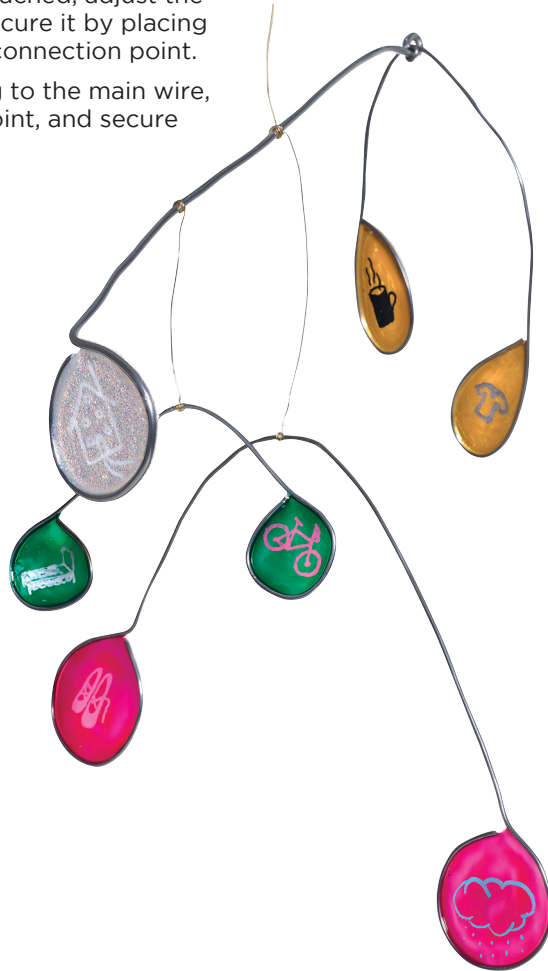
[Beadalon Supplemax](#), .25 mm, 50 m (60637-1008)

[Beadalon Standard Combo Pliers](#), (60671-1008)

Small collected objects such as beads, papers, glitter, sequins, mementos, charms, or yarn scraps

## Process

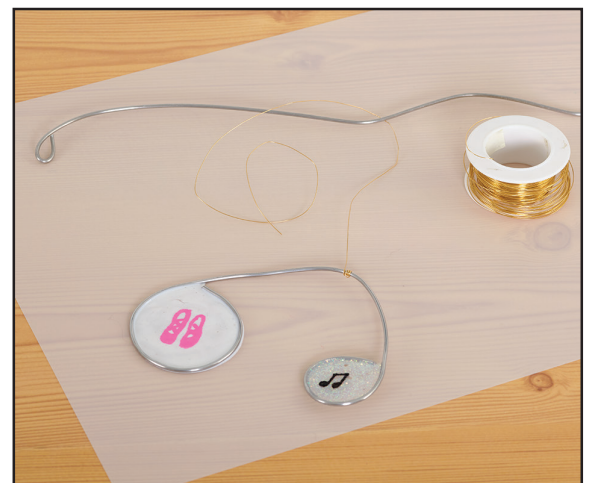
1. Select three to seven lengths of wire. These can be similar in size or vary in size. Form an enclosed flat shape at each end.
2. Prepare a working surface by placing a piece of cardboard or chipboard underneath a sheet of plastic. Grafix acetate sheets work well for this and can easily be cut to a desired size.
3. Place wire shape as flat as possible against the working surface. Use tape to secure them. For longer pieces, make a U bend in the middle, allowing both ends with the shape to rest on the surface.
4. Referring to the list of what keeps us balanced, design each shape with one balancing activity or person in mind. Shapes can be filled in two different ways:
  - I. Select a color of Arti'Stick paint for the inside of the wire shape. Working from the inside edge of the shape, begin by following the wire, making sure there is good contact between the paint and the wire. Once the inside edges have been traced, begin filling in the shape with paint. After the paint has dried, use a marker to fill each shape with a symbol or a word representing how that activity or person brings balance to life.
  - II. Shapes can also be filled with enclosures. Beads, charms, yarn, decorative papers, drawings, and other found objects can be enclosed by placing the item within the wire shape, and then filling with Arti'Stick.
5. Assemble the mobile using the thicker, 9 gauge wire for the main backbone to which other pieces will be attached. Allow students to play with different compositions. Sculpture wire, though easy to bend, will hold its shape.
6. Attach each piece by wrapping thin brass wire around the the center of the sculpture wire pieces.
7. After all pieces are attached, adjust the wire as needed and secure it by placing a dot of glue at each connection point.
8. Attach a wire or string to the main wire, at the balanced midpoint, and secure it with glue to hang.



**Step 1:** Place shaped wire flat on a working surface covered in plastic and fill shapes with Arti'Stick paint; add enclosures, if desired.



**Step 2:** Use markers to draw directly onto dry pieces.



**Step 3:** Arrange pieces onto main wire with thin brass wire.

## Options

- Liquitex pouring medium tinted with Blick liquid watercolor can be used as a substitute for Arti'stick Alternate means and materials. [For what? Arti'Stick Window Color? -AM]
- Use a clear string, such as Beadalon Supplemax, to attach pieces instead of wire to heighten the sense of objects floating in space.
- Use various thicknesses of wire to create a greater difference in movement of the piece.

## National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

### Creating

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

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

### Responding

**Anchor Standard 8:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

### Connecting

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