

Contour Collaborations



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Spark creativity and fire-up imaginations with this "wired" surrealist-type activity

When artists play, amazing things can happen.

For instance, when the Surrealists André Breton, Yves Tanguy, Jacques Prévert, and Marcel Duchamp got together in 1925, they played games to engage their subconscious thoughts. Consequences was a word game where participants would write sentence fragments on a piece of paper, then fold it so that the next person couldn't see what was written. Opening the paper would reveal a very silly sentence. The artists turned the words into drawings and called it "Exquisite Corpse," after a sentence they came up with while playing Consequences: "The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine."

That game spread like wildfire and is still popular today.

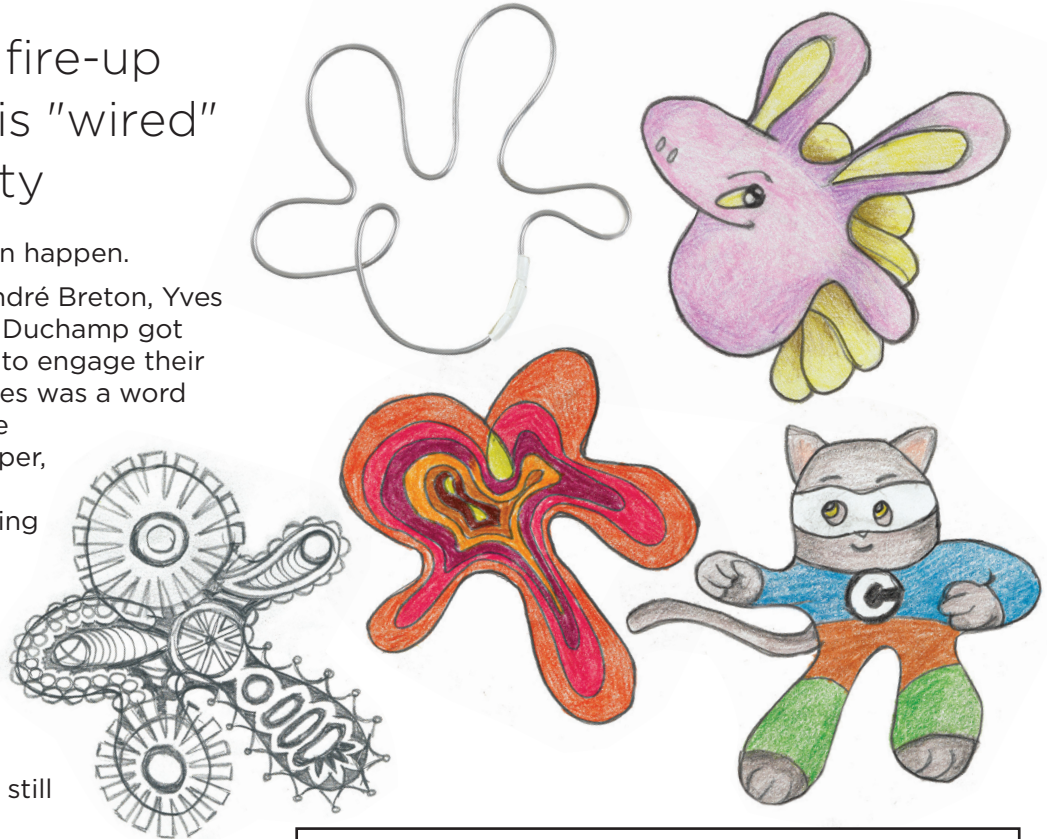
The energy of collaboration, the humor, the freedom to create without being responsible for the entire piece, the experience of drawing without competitiveness or worry—there are many reasons people of all ages and artistic interests love to play drawing games.

Here's one that can be done in a group or classroom setting that uses contour lines to stimulate imaginative thinking.

Wires are bent and formed to create shapes, then shared with another artist, who traces the outline. The shape then becomes the contours of... what? That's entirely up to the artist!

Much like looking for objects in the shapes of clouds, each person sees things a little differently. Psychology calls the act of seeing faces, animals, and likenesses in random objects "pareidolia." It's a natural, common function of a person's vision and brain working together to define what they are seeing.

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



Materials (required)

Blick Armature Wire, 50-ft, 11.5 gauge (33400-1155); share one across class

Scotch Super 33+ Vinyl Electrical Tape, 3/4" x 8-yds (54118-1025); share one across class

Blick White Sulphite Drawing Paper, 80-lb, 9" x 12", ream (10209-1033); need one sheet per student

Blick Masking Tape, natural, 3/4" x 60-yd roll (24149-1034); share 4-5 rolls across class

Blick Studio Drawing Pencils, 6B or similar (22220-2061); need one per student

Optional Materials

Mini Long-Nose Pliers, 5" (33083-1010)

Blick Studio Artists' Colored Pencils, set of 24, assorted (22063-0249)

Maped Color'Peps Infinity Colored Pencils, classpack of 72 (82545-1019)

Pilot Extra Fine Point Permanent Marker, 0.4 mm, Black (22107-2050)

Ready to order materials?

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

Preparation

1. Select wire appropriate for age group. For younger students, use Twisteez wires: they are plastic-coated and easier to bend. For grades 5+, use aluminum wire cut into 20" pieces (30 per 50-ft roll). Each student will need one piece.

Process

1. Join ends of wire. This could be prepared ahead of time. Form a circle so that ends overlap one another by an inch or less. Wrap tightly with a piece of electrical tape, covering the overlapped area and including both ends.
2. Bend wires to form an abstract shape. As an option, plier tools may be provided in order to form smaller bends.
3. Share wire creation with another group member by passing or picking out of a box.
4. Place the wire on a piece of drawing paper and press down to make it lie as flat as possible. Secure in one or two places with a small piece of masking tape so that it doesn't move.
5. Trace the contour of the wire (inside or outside) with a pencil, then remove the wire.

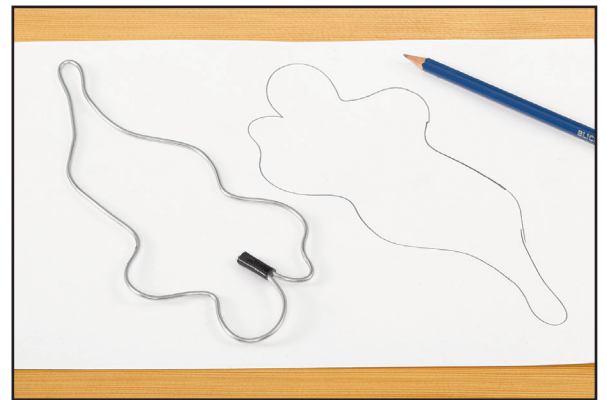
Contour lines are simple lines that define the shape of the form and also describe the details, without any changes in value. This is how most early artists begin, before learning about shading. A drawing made with just contour lines can be very minimal— think of Picasso's Dove. Or it can express lots of detail, like a topographic map that describes terrain levels.

To see a lesson plan featuring "blind" contour drawing, explore [Color Block Portrait Reveal](#).

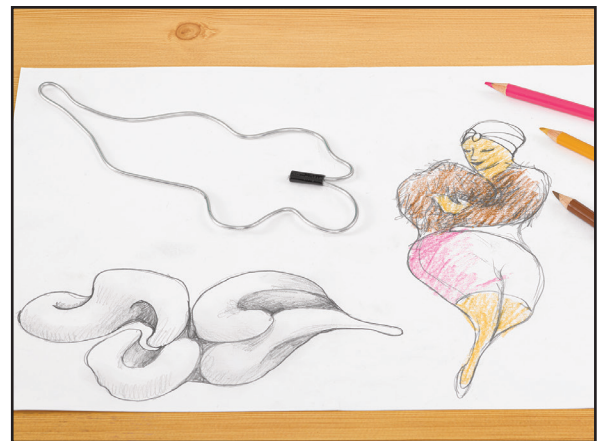
6. Look closely at the contour outline, turning the paper to view it from all angles. Does the shape bring to mind anything? Here are some prompts that may inspire:
 - Do you see an animal or human form? The fact is, most people will see faces first. Recognizing faces is so essential to social life that we are conditioned to see faces even when they are not there.
 - Secondary to faces, we often see animals that have very distinctive features. An elongated protrusion might bring to mind a tail, rabbit's ears, or an elephant's trunk, for instance. Two rounded areas might inspire mouse ears or camel humps.
 - If the imagination is stretched a little, it might find plants, flowers, or inanimate objects.
 - If the overall contour isn't inspiring anything, encourage looking at just a portion and start a drawing from there. It doesn't have to be a single image, or even completely filled in as a drawing.



Step 1: Form wires into abstract shapes. Share shape with another member of the group.



Step 2: Trace the shape onto paper and study the outer contours.



Step 3: Draw images and designs using contour lines to define the inside of the shape. These images can be refined later with colored pencils or markers.

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Process, continued

- It doesn't need to be an image at all—it can be filled in with random patterns, doodles, and designs.
 - The inside of the contour can be left as negative space, and drawing can be done on the outside of the contour.
7. Set a time limit of 5 to 10 minutes for working, then pass the wires again. Repeat the steps of tracing and drawing as often as there is time for the activity.
- Rather than scatter Contour Creations around the page with lots of white space between, place wire outlines close to one another. They can also overlap.
8. When the activity is over, look for the many different interpretations that individual artists found in a single shape.



Options

- Refine final drawings with colored pencil, marker, or shading.

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 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

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

