

# Into the LIGHT

**Helaine Schechtman**

There's always a surefire way of approaching a lesson that will make it work for students—a way that will make it easier, more palatable, and more successful so that students will feel good about the end results. Finding that way can be the challenge.

Shading, used to enhance or create a dimensional effect, is often the cause of anxiety among students. "I can't do it." "I'll never learn." "I don't want to do this." are among many other whines and complaints often heard when the mere mention of this unit is uttered. But, in the end, success is theirs! This is how:

## A Harmless Scribble

To initiate the unit, we start off with two harmless scribbles. Using two 6" (15 cm) squares of paper—one white and one black—students lightly draw a scribble on each. On the white paper they shade with an ebony pencil, being careful to shade with the direction of the outlines, and making sure that the outlines blend into the shading. They should try to keep the shading gradual, progressing from light to dark values slowly, without harsh jumps or streaks.

The other scribble is drawn on black paper, repeating the process but

with any light-colored pencil. When students work on the black paper, they are actually creating highlights rather than shading.

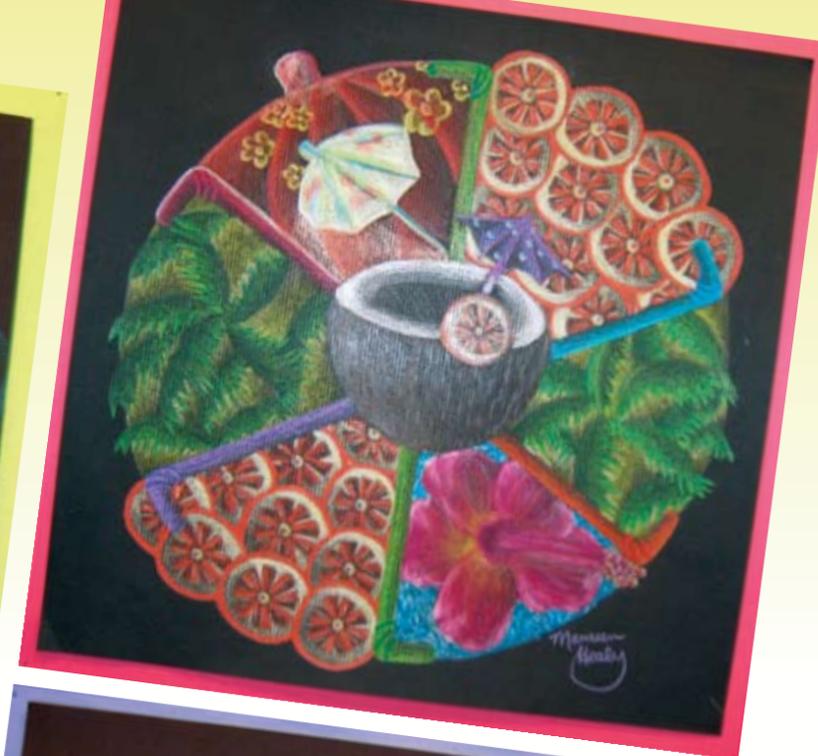
The heavier that students apply the ebony pencil on the white paper, the darker the area becomes. However, the heavier they apply the colored pencil on the black paper, the lighter the area actually gets. The effect is reversed. Almost all students find it easier to create the black scribble than the white one. They realize that, yes, maybe they can do this. The hook has been cast!

## A Circular Format

Working in a circular format can be a very different approach for many students. It allows them to view their piece from all directions while working. Through rough sketches, students

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decide if the focus will be a design or will follow a specific theme, such as astrological signs, holidays, food, animals, or whatever might be of interest. The design may represent a mandala, a word that comes from the Sanskrit meaning "circle," and symbolizes wholeness. It has been used in many cultures from the Aztec calendar to stained-glass rose windows in cathedrals, and even in the geometry books of many of our high-school students.



## Guidelines

In order to prevent the design from turning into a bull's-eye or target, I have students follow some basic guidelines. I require that they have a minimum of three concentric circles. The center circle is the focal point and therefore an important part of the design. The remaining circles are divided into a minimum of six sections, like spokes on a wheel. These can be straight, curvy, pronounced as part of the design, or as subtle as students want.

Once the sketches are thoroughly worked out, I have students test colors on scraps of smooth black paper and rougher black charcoal paper, since colors will appear very differently on black than they do on white. Students also test papers to see which texture they prefer.

## Coming Together

Students should choose a background paper, lightly pencil in the final version, and start highlighting. The trick behind this project is to have good color choices and patience. Ask students to slowly layer the colors to make the transitions very gradual, and take the colors right to the edges so the outlines blend in and disappear. This helps to enhance the forms that have been drawn.

Any black areas of paper left should be filled in with black colored pencil to have the same finish as the rest of the artwork. The student who was sure that shading was not in the realm of possibility has now proven the impossible. This often ends up being a favorite when finished. ☺

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## NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems.*

## WEB LINK

[thevirtualinstructor.com/white-on-black.html](http://thevirtualinstructor.com/white-on-black.html)