

Beginning with a Flower



Scott Russell

Many art teachers are encouraged to extend learning from the general classroom into the artroom, and I want to be sure that the content works well on a cross-curricular level.

Each year, second graders learn about caterpillars, butterflies, metamorphosis, and flowers. I took the opportunity to relate these themes to a lesson that covers concepts of color such as value, analogous, neutrals, and blending. While learning some art history we tie in contour line, pattern, and the use of symmetry in a three-dimensional collage.

Flowers and Georgia O'Keeffe

We begin with a flower. Students discuss what a flower looks like to a human, and what it looks like to a caterpillar. This prompts a discussion on scale and point of view. This portion of the lesson provides a great connection to Georgia O'Keeffe and her close-up views of flowers. After viewing selections of O'Keeffe's work, students can draw from life or memory.

We review the parts of a flower—petals, seeds, stem, and leaves—and students include them in their drawings. Coloring allows for a review (or introduction) of blending and value as students try to create interest by adding shadows and highlights. Students can assess the completion of the flower by identifying all the plant parts and by observing the creation of shadows and highlights.

Creating Caterpillars

For a caterpillar, students use a thin strip of paper (I use the stack that I have trimmed from many papers during the year) and use a template to trace circles that fill in the strip without touching. Using two crayons, black and a color of their choice, students create a value scale. A discussion of how to change the colors with pressure and blending develops as students learn to create values.

Students review a list of caterpillar anatomy words and, once identified, draw these parts onto their value scales. When completed, students cut out the value scale circles one at a time and glue them to the flowers, overlapping the pieces to make a complete caterpillar.

Adding Butterflies

Next comes another stage in metamorphosis—the adult butterfly. Using symmetry, students draw half of a butterfly in steps, choosing which way to first fold their papers. While drawing, they review the parts of a butterfly, again with information from their classroom teachers. They fold and cut and make the other half match using their knowledge of symmetry. If any antennas fall off from slipped scissors I tell students their butterfly was attacked by a predator—this usually elicits some giggles and calms any cutting mishaps.

We have a discussion on analogous colors as we study the color wheel. I ask, “Why would analogous colors be helpful to the butterfly?” We then discuss camouflage and animal adaptations. Students can select colors for the butterfly to camouflage or stand out with the flower they previously created. When complete, the body of the butterfly is attached to the flower to allow for the wings to be folded and add movement to the work.

Meeting a Pioneer Naturalist

Students look at the work of naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717). Merian was a naturalist and scientific illustrator who studied plants and insects from life and made detailed paintings about them. She was one



Elza Massey, grade two.

of the first to depict the stages of metamorphosis in insects in a time in which few women had the opportunity to become artists.

We talk about how details were important to her and I challenge students to find the four parts of the butterfly life cycle in her work. We talk about how these works were helpful to scientists of the past and how we can use them today.

Students are able to make connections to their own art as we discuss the art career of scientific illustration. Looking at Merian’s work, students realize their life cycles are missing some parts: the eggs and the chrysalis. Using hole punches, they create any number of eggs to include. They also learn about neutral colors and how they are made to draw and color the chrysalis. You might also choose to

make these parts from clay or another sculptural medium.

Students were amazed at how much they could connect their science lessons to this art project. When it was time for review, I found that more students remembered the different elements of color because they could make connections to the insects. 🐞

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum.

WEB LINKS

home.wtal.de/hh/merian/meng.htm
home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/msdeu.htm