

# Best of Show



**Nancy Corrigan Wilbert**

**D**ogs rule! Well, actually dogs, cats, birds, and maybe an occasional hamster rule. In an attempt to motivate my studio art students for an exciting theme for a unit on painting, I delved into the arena of the family pet. Most everyone at some point has had experience with a pet, so why not use their familiarity with this theme for our painting unit?

To get started, I asked students to bring in as many pictures of family pets as they could. Close-ups, especially headshots, were preferred. If students didn't have a pet, they could select a favorite breed or work from extra photographs that their peers had brought. It was soon very apparent that this theme would be a huge success. The next day, I was inundated with numerous photographs. All but two were dogs.

#### Prepping the Canvas

Our canvas size was 11 x 14" (28 x 35 cm). I found that photocopying the pictures to that scale helped in the sketching process. Students had to create four thumbnail sketches that

were properly scaled and made good use of space. Each student then chose his or her favorite sketch to transfer to canvas.

Canvas comes in bright white and I feel it needs to be toned down prior to use. To lay down a quick color foundation for the paintings, students used a light-grey toned gesso. Grey gesso can be created by mixing regular gesso with a little bit of grey acrylic paint. I have found that images sometimes emerge more easily on a toned surface and colors can appear more vibrant. Sketches were then transferred with pencil to the canvas.

#### The Painting Process

Students color-coded their entire canvas with a color wash. I found this helped in preventing them from going into too much detail too quickly. They added "layers" of acrylic to the canvas each day. As images started to appear more fully developed, you could hear the positive conversation throughout the room. It was contagious!

Each day brought new victories,

especially for students who didn't feel confident at the start of the lesson. Students were encouraged to really look at the photographs that they were working from. Fur texture, directionality, and whiskers would create the finishing touches. Finally, students added a solid or gradated background, which complemented the coloring and tones of the subject.

The finished results spoke for themselves. I promptly created a display titled "Best of Show." The feedback was tremendous and I was very proud of my students. There was even a discussion about auctioning a pet portrait as a fundraiser for the local animal shelter. 🐾

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#### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.*

#### WEB LINK

[www.akc.org/breeds/complete\\_breed\\_list.cfm](http://www.akc.org/breeds/complete_breed_list.cfm)

