

THE TOWER OF PAPER



David Andrews

One of the most frustrating experiences a first-year art teacher can have is the realization that there are things that happen during the first week of classroom teaching that they just don't teach you in school. It is often difficult to capture the interest of students on that first chaotic day. Most teachers wonder, "How do I teach an art assignment during those first few days to excite my students right away?" There are a number of different projects and assignments I've tried during this time, but the one "sure thing" has always been the Tower of Paper.

Today's high-performance organizations require team players who can communicate, problem solve, and negotiate. Team members must be flexible, adaptable, and able to work together to further their company's goals to succeed and stay competitive. So after the rubrics, syllabi, and other assorted data are distributed, this project is designed to teach problem-solving skills and encourage teamwork.

Building Towers

First, collect as much newspaper and rolls of masking tape as you can. Divide the class into small groups and provide newspaper and masking tape for each group. Write the lesson objectives on the board and discuss them with students. Also share the following mandatory criteria:

- Each tower must stand as tall as the tallest person in the room.
- Students can use only masking tape and newspaper.
- Each tower must stand by itself.

I generally give students about twenty minutes to solve this problem. Afterwards, we have a critique of each group's project with the following questions:

- Did everyone have a job?
- Is their tower aesthetically pleasing?
- Does art always need to be pretty?
- Would the structure change if they had been given more time to plan?
- Would the design change if they had different materials, like cardboard or paint?
- How might they change things the next time they work together?
- Did the classroom environment affect the overall design?
- Would their towers stand up outside the classroom environment for any great length of time?
- Does art always need to be



archival, or can it be spontaneous?

Encouraging Creativity

Many students walk into the art room with the mentality of "I can't draw; therefore I'm no good at art." This assignment is a great team builder and motivational tool. It gets students moving and interacting with their classmates immediately, and helps them think about art in a different setting.

We do not expect every student to become an artist, but we do expect them to try their best by learning guidelines for creating and appreciating works of art. We want them to understand that "art does not always need to be pretty" and that art allows for individual beliefs and opinions that encourage students to think analytically and grow creatively. 🌀

David Andrews is art instructor and fine arts department chair at McKinney North High School in McKinney, Texas. dandrews@mckinneyisd.net

NATIONAL STANDARD

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

WEB LINK

www.instructables.com/id/How-to-build-a-paper-tower

www.analytictech.com/mb021/papertower.htm

