



Above: Nicholas Burbine, grade six. Top right: Brian Kong, grade six. Bottom right: Matthew Young, grade six.

# What's Your Cubist Name?

**Jeff Tam**

**M**y first college art class introduced me to the Italian word *chiaroscuro*. It refers to using light and dark values to achieve volumetric forms and contrast. I was greatly influenced by this concept in my own work and wanted to incorporate it into my teaching.

## Tints/Shades

The preliminary painting skill I have my students learn is gradation. Gradation is critical because every artist needs to learn how to

control and mix paint. I define it to my class as slowly moving, step by step, from one color tone to another.

Initially, I have students choose a single color and add either white or black paint to it. They next make a gradation and see how many "steps" they can achieve. Unconsciously, they are learning tints and shades. (Tint = White + Color. Shade = Color + Black.)

I then have students simply continue practice painting lines or forms of gradation for a thirty- to forty-minute period.

## Cubism

I introduce students to Pablo Picasso and Cubism through a slideshow, emphasizing how various perspectives can be used to view an object. I give each student an 18 x 24" (30 x 45 cm) sheet of white paper on which they can begin creating an abstract Cubist composition based on the letters of their names.

**Gradation is critical because every artist needs to learn how to control and mix paint.**

Each student begins by writing the first letter of his or her name large, filling the whole sheet of paper. These must be fully formed letters in bubble form (no stick letters!) or in a font the student has chosen. Next, I have them turn the paper clockwise and write the second letter of the name overlapping the previous letter. This process continues with each additional letter

until the name is complete, resulting in a composition that suggests a Cubist influence.

## Color Schemes

The final step is to choose color schemes to guide students in their Cubist work. Students choose one color scheme: analogous, complementary, or monochromatic. Once the color format is chosen, students gradate all the shapes/forms in their compositions with tints and shades in the chosen color scheme. 🌀

*Jeff Tam is an art teacher at Niu Valley Middle School in Honolulu, Hawaii. jeff\_tam@notes.k12.hi.us*

## NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas.*

## WEB LINK

[www.niuvalleymiddle.org/teachers/jeff\\_tam](http://www.niuvalleymiddle.org/teachers/jeff_tam)