

Dexter



Dexter Mason, age three, monoprint painting, Splashes of Autumn.

Mirror Painting Monoprints

Ranella Franklin

I knew the importance of teaching art at all levels, but I didn't realize how important it was for even the youngest child, until I returned to teaching children with developmental disabilities. The ages of the children in my present class (most of whom have Down syndrome) range from eighteen months to three years old. Their simple joy in the art experience alone provides enough evidence to warrant its inclusion regularly.

Because my main goal for this age level is to provide opportunities for enriching experiences that engage the senses, I call our art time "Experiential Art." Our mirror painting art activity helps strengthen body awareness, increases attention spans,

develops pre-writing and fine motor skills, builds understanding of cause and effect, and encourages self-control. It also builds receptive and expressive language skills.

Mirror Painting

Mirror painting is always a special "Experiential Art" time for our students. Since they continually gravitate during their daily play to the many vertical mirrors around our classroom, I thought that it might be interesting to place a mirror horizontally on the art table and then let the children paint on it. They loved it and were quite curious to view themselves and tap on the mirror.

Procedures

After covering the children's clothing with a smock (each student works with one adult), we hand them a brush and let them dip and paint directly onto the mirror (bristle brushes, paint rollers, and sponge brushes all work). Most of our children have limited language skills, so we provide words for them that describe what they're doing ("Your brush is going round and round.") and how they're feeling ("You really get excited when you paint!"). We also label the colors that they're using and provide guidance to encourage them to move their hands in different directions (up/down, side-to-side, round and round).

As the children paint, they stop occasionally and move their heads



Pulling the print: Dexter M., age three.

closer to the mirror to get a better look. When a child begins to tire or lose interest, we offer a new color. Another possibility is to give the child a second paintbrush—painting with both hands at the same time is frequently quite motivating to young children, and it adds a different dimension to the skills they are developing.

Monoprinting

To conclude our mirror painting, we move the brushes and paint aside and help the children lay a blank sheet of construction paper on top of where they painted. They have a great time patting and rubbing the back of the paper. Even more fun is pulling the paper off the mirror and seeing the great monoprint.

Though mirror painting is a particularly fun and valuable experience for very young children, older children would also enjoy it. Adaptations could include the use of smaller mirrors and the position of the mirrors could be either horizontal or vertical. They could also create interesting artwork by painting with different colors on different mirrors and then using the same piece of paper on top of each mirror.

Jaxson S., age twenty months, monoprint painting, Fun with Autumn Swirls.



Materials

- 24 x 48" (61 x 122 cm) acrylic mirror
- something to place under the mirror to keep it from sliding around on the table (any rubber-type product, or even masking tape would work)
- 12 x 18" (30 x 46 cm) paper (white and light colors are nice, but manila is also fine)
- tempera paint in small containers
- paintbrushes, two per color
- smocks (or old t-shirts) to protect clothes
- moistened washcloths
- small container for moistened washcloths
- old towels

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