

Timeline of Learning in the Visual Arts

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Tracing the Path of Visual Learning and Growth

What happens in the minds of children when they are drawing? What do students learn in an art class? How does this relate to the rest of a child's development? These are some of the questions the art teachers of Mount Pleasant Central School District set out to answer when we began compiling the *Timeline of Learning in the Visual Arts*.

While the current focus on standardized testing provides a sharper focus on student growth and progress in math and language learning, it does little to in-

form us about the full spectrum of learning and growth that is vital to every child's education and development.

The *Timeline* charts the artistic growth and development of students across grade levels in our district, and serves to demonstrate that learning in the visual arts can be mapped and understood as cognitive growth that occurs over time when a consistent and sequential art curriculum is implemented. It is based on the theme of *space* - how do students develop spatial thinking skills and learn to depict space in

their artwork over the course of their education? As one of many concepts that are taught in the visual arts, space serves as a lens through which to view this cross-section of artistic development.

Given that education should encompass the growth of the "whole" person, we hope that this document and accompanying exhibition will provide you with insight and understanding about the important learning that takes place in the visual arts.

Grades k - 1

Spatial Relationships Through Size

Early learning takes place through sensory-motor engagement with the environment. As soon as young children develop an ability to hold a drawing tool, they begin to make kinesthetic marks, which we call "scribbles."

In kindergarten and first grade, children move away from the "scribbling stage," and begin to represent their world through universal shapes and enclosures. They discover that they can join together stick lines and shapes to make "a person" or other subjects. This is known as the *pre-schematic stage*. The child may begin "naming" the subjects of his drawings, even though they bear little resemblance to the subject. This leads to the *schematic stage*, in which a *schema*, or repertoire of symbols, is used to represent common subjects. Triangles, circles, lines, amorphic shapes, and enclosures are now used to create recognizable visual images. Students are often concerned with the narrative of their art creations. They wish to "tell the story." Their drawing shows the essence of what they wish to convey with a wonderful simplicity that is often envied by artists themselves!



Figure 1: Winter Landscape, Grade 1



Figure 2: Winter Landscape, Grade 1

Lesson Title

Winter Landscape

Teacher

Nanci DiNome

Objective

Students learn that subjects in the foreground are larger than those farther away in the background



Figure 3: Winter Landscape, Grade 1

Depicting Near and Far

Students were introduced to spatial relationships through size in this lesson. They learned that things closer, or in the *foreground*, are bigger than objects farther away, or in the *background*. The children were first read the book *When the Winter Comes*. The teacher discussed the book's illustrations with them.

Students quickly noticed that the larger the tree was, the closer it seemed. The literacy connection between the story and the image seemed to help the children understand the spatial concepts

taught. The materials used for this project were white chalk, color crayons, and blue construction paper. Upon finishing the lesson, students gathered on the rug in the class to view and assess their

artwork. Their teacher led them in a discussion of their finished landscapes, noting how long a walk in the snow it would be back to their far away trees, fences, or houses.

The schematic representation of trees and fences - with stick lines and triangles - is apparent in the above examples.

Students quickly noticed that the larger the tree was, the closer it seemed.

Grades 2 - 4

Representation Grows

Students in the second through fourth grades are now more conscious of spatial relationships (i.e. the grass is on the ground the sun is in the sky). Children also depict space by drawing subjects that may appear to be upside down. This is referred to as “folding over.” An example of this may be seen when children show people sitting at a table, figures extending outwards in all four directions.

Where younger children will often line up all subjects on a single baseline near the bottom of the page, students at this age are developing a more nuanced and multi-layered sense of receding space. Multiple baselines appear, as can be seen in the images on these pages. Also of note is the increasing level of detail and individuality of the trees - which marks the transition from the *schematic* stage to the *representational* stage. This is the stage at which children become more interested in observing the details of things around them. These new powers of observation translate to more refined skills of representation. Consequently, this is also the age at which children often become “experts” - learning the minute of details about subjects such as trains, airplanes, horses, or insects.



Figure 4: Landscape, Grade 2



Figure 5: Landscape, Grade 3



Figure 6: Landscape, Grade 3



Figure 7: Landscape, Grade 4

Lesson Title

Fall Landscape with Watercolors

Teacher

Lauralee Chambers

Objective

Students should be able to recognize and identify foreground, middleground, and background in a landscape painting, and include these layers in their own paintings

Multiple Layers of Space

Students at Columbus Elementary were introduced to painting a landscape with watercolors. A number of landscape paintings, including those of Cazanne, were shown to the students. They were then asked to depict a landscape with at least three spatial layers - foreground, middleground, and background. These spatial concepts were discussed and explained to the children. The teacher also demonstrated watercolor techniques, showing students how to fill in different layers using

blending, washes, and shading. Students used “autumn” colors. They had also done a previous lesson on trees, and were required to include one or more trees in their scene.

Students at Columbus Elementary were introduced to painting a landscape with watercolors

While the second grade students used black markers to outline their spatial layers, the older students initially sketched their images with crayon.

While most students were successful in depicting multiple layers of space, some struggled with the size proportions of additional items, such as pumpkins, placed in their scenes.

Grades 5 - 6

An Expanding World

Often referred to as the *Gang Age*, fifth and sixth grade is a time when students place a great emphasis on peer relationships and they begin the transition toward adolescence. Rapid body changes make for energetic changes in pre-adolescent students. Between grades six through eight, there are great changes in students' artistic abilities. A sixth grade student is capable of drawing a representation of an object from life with increasing attention to detail. Although many incorporate previously learned stereotypes ("shorthand" methods of depicting things such as flowers, birds, or windows), students now have an expanding repertoire of skills and techniques for representing a growing range of subjects.

As the child's experiences begin to reach out beyond the home and family, the subject matter of a student's artwork may expand to include cultural, literary, community, or imaginative references. This reflects the child's growing awareness of his or her place within the larger world. A child's emotional reactions to his or her experiences become an important component of the artwork at this stage as well.



Figure 8: Shell House, Grade 5



Figure 9: Egyptian Bas-Relief, Grade 6

Lesson Title (Grade 5)
Shell House

Teacher
Susan Cowles-Dumitru

Objective
Students will use observational and imaginative skills to represent a fantasy space in a shell

Lesson Title (Grade 6)
Egyptian Bas-Relief

Teacher
Susan Cowles-Dumitru

Objective
Students will learn about and use Egyptian conventions of representing space



Figure 10: Egyptian Bas-Relief, Grade 6

Imaginative Space

Previously fifth grade students had done observational drawings of seashells. The painting assignment that followed required them to imagine themselves shrinking down and walking inside of their shell. They had to visualize what the interior space would look like; what kinds

Their knowledge of Egyptian culture was expanded to include artistic traditions

of windows, doors, or furniture would the shell house have? What kind of environment would their shell house be in? They had to paint not only the house and what it looked like but also what they could see in the environment

around them.

The sixth grade project linked to the students' social studies curriculum, in which they study Egypt. Their knowledge of

Egyptian culture was expanded to include artistic traditions, including the magnificent sphinxes and pyramids, and Egyptian modes of representing space (in strict profile and directly from above). Students were asked to create a clay bas-relief that depicted four aspects of their culture, but to represent this using the Egyptian style of representing space.

Grade 7

Visual Detail, Symbol and Meaning

An increased attention to technical detail, and complexity of color, design, and visual organization are characteristic of the artwork of seventh grade students. Where the younger child sought to tell a "story" through the act of painting, the seventh grade student is more interested in creating a visual scene that is rich in detail and emotional content. Color begins to take on more emotive qualities, visual phenomena - such as shadows and receding planes - begin to appear (note their use in these examples), and symbolic meaning is often attached to colors and objects (the student in *figure 11* stated that the rain symbolized his sorrow over the death of a grandparent).

Representing the human figure through doodles, sketches, or cartoons becomes a natural pastime of many young adolescents, who are adjusting to the dramatic changes in their own figures. The ability to visualize and approximate the proportions and foreshortening of the human figure as it moves through space is a product of their growing capacity for abstract thought.



Figure 11: A Moment in My Life, Grade 7



Figure 12: A Moment in My Life, Grade 7

Lesson Title

A Moment in My Life

Teacher

Michael Anderson

Objective

Students learn to observe and represent the human figure in relation to activity and spatial surroundings

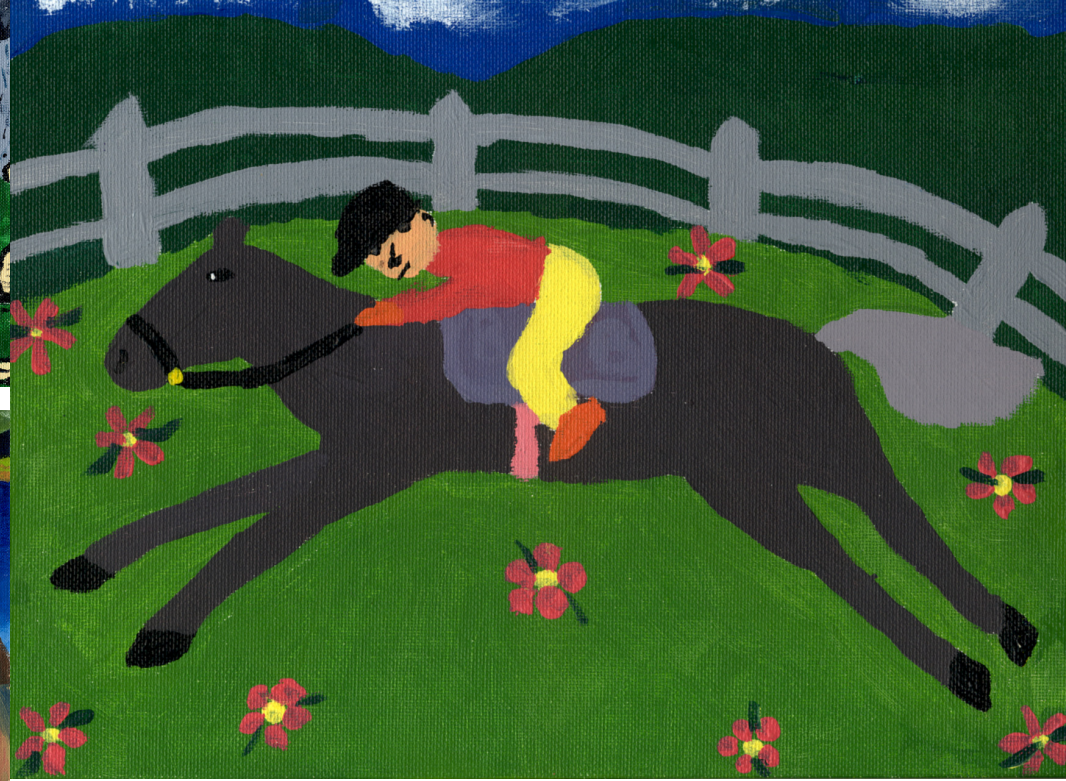


Figure 13: A Moment in My Life, Grade 7

Figures in Space

Students were asked to think back on several important moments in their life. Who was there with them? What were they thinking or feeling? What colors do they associate with this memory?

Before painting a scene from their life, the students were led

Before painting a scene from their life, the students were led through a series of exercises on the figure

through a series of exercises on the figure. To create a compelling depiction of the human figure, one must first gain a sense of the size relationships between the different parts of the body. To do this, students created cut-paper

figures from photographs of athletes, isolating each separate shape they could find in the body, and comparing the relative sizes of the shapes they had cut. These proportions are

complicated by foreshortening - the idea that forms appear to change in size and shape when they extend toward the viewer - a phenomenon that many students

picked up on as they observed the photographs.

The students then applied these observations as they painted themselves in an important memory.

Grade 8

A Topsy-Turvy World

Eighth grade can be a time of tremendous turmoil. Students are increasingly self-conscious about their physical appearance, their social acceptance, and their abilities. Some days it may feel like the whole world is turned upside down. This is an age when students develop a stonger interest in engaging with works of art - such as those by the Surrealists - that mirror this topsy-turvy state of being.

Students more and more seek to make objects and images look "realistic." At the same time, they are often "dissatisfied with their drawings and often remark that something 'doesn't look right.'" This is the point at which some students shut down their artistic production altogether, moving into adulthood with an arrested visual development. Tending to the needs of adolescents at this stage with technical and emotional reinforcement is crucial to avoid the premature closing down of the artistic and imaginative capacities. Unfortunately, only about twenty percent of students currently receive art instruction in this critical year of their development.

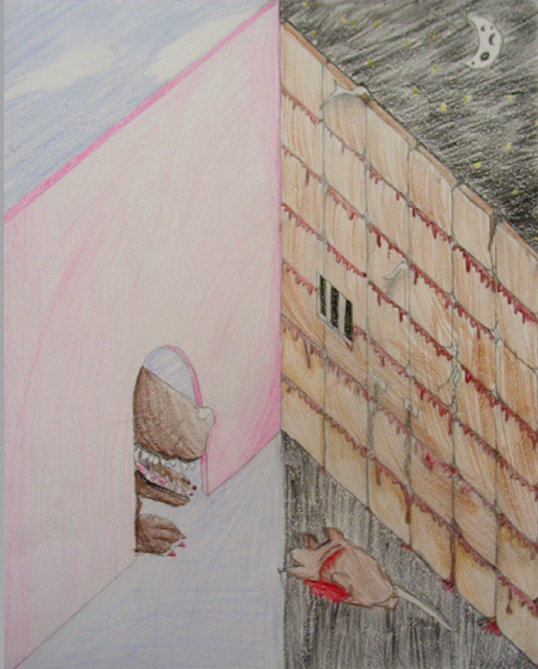


Figure 14: Surrealist Perspective, Grade 8



Figure 15: Surrealist Perspective, Grade 8

Lesson Title

Surrealist Perspective

Teacher

Susan Cowles-Dumitru

Objective

Students learn that perspective can be used to represent a surreal image



Figure 16: Surrealist Perspective, Grade 8

Surreal Space

Students had previously studied the drawing conventions of perspective. Some students struggled with this, while others picked it up easily. The teacher demonstrated the technique of drawing space using a horizon line and vanishing point. After successfully completing their technical exercises, students were shown a slideshow on Surrealist artworks that used perspective to depict space. They were then required to invent their own surrealist space. They were given five different spatial models

to choose from to do this. Most students selected the easiest one, which was the single point perspective. Students were also given non-perspective spatial options such as axonometric drawing and a few selected these. The project was carried out using art markers on tag board. Students were able to view their artwork during the Middle School art show, and to make informal comments about their success.

Students were shown a slideshow on Surrealist artworks that used perspective to depict space

Grade 9

Growing Sophistication

Ninth grade marks the emergence into high school and, for many students, the final year of formal instruction in the visual arts. (In fact, some students only study art through seventh grade!) The acceptance that a large percentage of the population will go through life with a ninth grade understanding of visual communication and cognitive skills is emblematic of a society that misunderstands and devalues the role of artistic and visual development. It's effects can be seen in the ubiquitous exclamation of "I'm not artistic!" by adults faced with the common challenge of sketching a diagram or designing a visual presentation. It would be hard to imagine our society accepting such a low standard of learning in any other discipline.

Students in the Studio Art course study a range of concepts, techniques, media, and critical analysis strategies that will make them informed and active viewers and contributors to their visual culture and environment as adults. Their cognitive growth allows them greater sophistication in the use of mechanical conventions - such as the use of linear perspective - for depicting three-dimensional space.



Figure 17: Perspective Cityscape, Grade 9

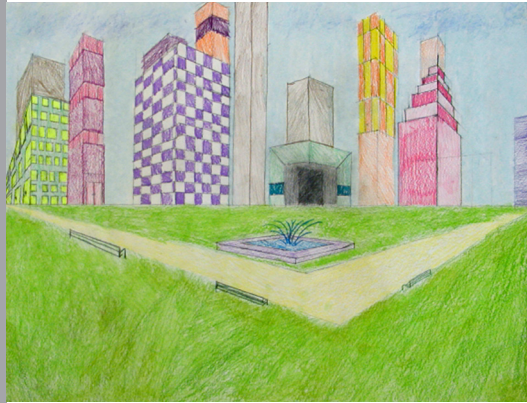


Figure 18: Perspective Cityscape, Grade 9

Lesson Title

Perspective Cityscape

Teacher

Michael Anderson

Objective

Students learn that linear perspective can be used to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface



Figure 19: Perspective Cityscape, Grade 9

Working with Linear Perspective Drawing

Students were introduced to the drawing conventions of one and two-point linear perspective through a series of increasingly complex exercises. As they progressed, their ability to manipulate these principles to suit their own ideas and designs grew. Having viewed a

Students were presented with the problem of creating a cityscape of their own design in perspective

wide variety of traditional and contemporary architecture styles, the students were presented with the problem of creating a cityscape of their own design using two-point perspective.

While most students had mastered the process of drawing single structures, some students struggled with the spatial relationships between buildings (such as how to show that one building was behind or on equal footing with another).

Other students were driven to find solutions for the more complicated structures and ornamentation they had devised in their building designs. The central tower and "crown" cupola in *figure 19* are representative of this more elaborate manipulation of perspective techniques.

Grades 10 - 12

Expanding Proficiency

High School students who continue beyond the mandated requirement in the visual arts experience a wide range of opportunities. They are able to apply and refine their foundational learning in a host of art media - from ceramics and drawing and painting, to photography, video, digital media, or design. As students become more proficient in a variety of media and visual concepts, the range of choices available to them in the creative process begins to widen significantly. Selections of material, color, style, and technique become more nuanced and informed by their appropriateness and ability to communicate the intended message. This level of sophistication in the creative process is akin to the nuanced choice of words, style, and voice that goes into the writing process students learn in their English composition courses.

Students in the upper grades are able to approximate spatial dimensions and relationships with increasing skill and complexity. Visual acuity and sensitivity to more complicated spatial relationships in subjects such as the foreshortened human figure, or the bicycle (as the examples on this page illustrate) are further developed.



Figure 20: *Beyond the Bike*, Grades 10-12

Figure 21: *Black & White Challenge*, Grades 10-12

Figure 22: *Beyond the Bike*, Grades 10-12

Lesson Title

Beyond the Bike

Teacher

Claudia Papazian-Moravec

Objective

To understand positive and negative space through observational drawing and painting

Lesson Title

Black & White Challenge

Teacher

Claudia Abate

Objective

To utilize software to explore concepts in foundational art

Observing Spatial Details

Segmented observational drawings of a bicycle in which their separate parts, when put together, would form a whole. Drawing such a complex subject can be overwhelming, requiring a great deal of concentration and observational skill. The focus on positive and negative space helped students to break down the intricate spaces and structures of the bicycle, and record them with greater detail. Color theory was addressed, requiring students to collabora-

Drawing such a complex subject can be overwhelming, requiring a great deal of concentration and observational skill

tively decide what color to paint both the negative and positive parts of their mural. The collaborative spirit of this lesson was carried into the assessment process, as students worked together to devise the criteria for their final grading rubric.

Digital Imaging students completed a lesson in which they explored the use of positive and negative space while creating designs in Adobe Photoshop. Despite the ease that computer technology affords, the foundational principles of design remain a crucial part of the creative process.