

Hiding in Plain Sight

Nancy Walkup

As an elementary art teacher, I am always interested in projects that make natural, meaningful connections between art and other disciplines while also challenging students to think. One such project is a habitat diorama that depicts a camouflaged animal appropriate for the setting.

Talking About Camo

I first display reproductions of artworks that depict different habitats, drawing from various times and cultures, and discuss them with students. Bev Doolittle's amazing camouflaged artworks are engaging for young students, as are works by artists such as Henry Rousseau and John James Audubon. We discuss the characteristics of different habitats

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and how camouflage is an adaptation for survival. We brainstorm a list of ecosystems and camouflaged animals found in them and then look at and discuss a PowerPoint presentation about camouflaged animals in their environments.

Building Habitats

Students next choose an environment, as their choices determine what color of 9 x 9" (or 12 x 12") construction paper each will start with for the background of the diorama. They can choose from tan for a desert environment, green for a forest or rainforest, white for an arctic environment, or blue for an underwater scene. Once they receive their chosen papers, students follow the steps below:

1. Fold the piece of paper in half and then in half again. It will now have four square sections. Open the paper and cut on one fold only to the center of the square. After making the cut, carefully overlap the two cut edges and fold the paper into a "box" (actually a corner of a box). Glue together the overlapping edges.
2. Use construction paper to construct two- and three-dimensional figures and objects and glue them inside the "box." Fill in the area formed by the box with paper sculpture techniques (folding tabs so objects can stand, curling paper, going beyond the space of the box, overlapping shapes).

I encourage students to start with larger pieces of paper before moving to numerous details. All kinds of paper sculpture techniques and paper can be used in the dioramas. The animals, birds, or underwater creatures for the dioramas can be made from paper, clay, or other modeling materials. If students are making clay animals, they can make those first and work on the dioramas while waiting for the clay to dry and be fired.

When the dioramas are complete, students write narratives or artist statements to accompany their artworks for display. The artworks make a really impressive display when grouped together.

Nancy Walkup taught this lesson at W.S. Ryan Elementary School in Denton, Texas. Nancy is the editor of SchoolArts. nwalkup@davisart.com

NATIONAL STANDARD

Students explore and understand prospective content for works of art.

WEB LINK

animoto.com/play/IibdKBMR5pG0bVmtDKL64g

Objectives

Students will:

- respond to works of art that depict habitats or ecosystems with beliefs about their meanings and value, supported by persuasive reasoning.
- create an effective paper sculpture diorama that represents a particular habitat or ecosystem.
- appropriately include a camouflaged animal that would be found in the habitat or ecosystem depicted.

Vocabulary

- habitat/ecosystem/biome
- adaptation
- camouflage
- diorama

Resources and Materials

- reproductions of artworks that depict ecosystems
- pencils or crayons
- 9 x 9" (23 x 23 cm) or 12 x 12" (30 x 30 cm) squares of construction paper in assorted natural colors (green, white, brown, blue, etc.)
- assorted sizes and colors of construction paper for details
- scissors
- glue