



Channeling the Movement

Mary Coy

Middle-school students are always in motion. Watch them walk down the hallway and they're bumping into each other, slapping each other on the arm or the back, jostling for position, subtly racing each other with longer strides. Sometimes getting them to settle down into an eighty-six-minute block can be a challenge. They don't want to sit down; they want to move! As exhausting as it is to watch these students, it is also interesting and humorous.

My students' constant movement prompted me to think about a project showcasing movement in design. The unit begins with an exploration of the various types of movement in art: kinetic, sympathetic, and implied movement.

Kinetic Movement

Having learned about kinetic energy in science class, many of my seventh-grade students already know that it can be defined as energy in motion. How better to demonstrate kinetic artwork than to bring out my collection of zoetropes and phenakistiscopes, two early devices used to show moving pictures? Students spin a wheel containing a series of images on it, while at the same time peering through slots cut into the edge of the wheel toward a mirror. The movement of the wheel, in combination with the sequencing of the images creates an illusion that the characters are running, jumping, etc.

Spinning holographic disks, spinning tops, mobiles, and other toys also can be used to illustrate the idea of

kinetic movement in art. The work of Alexander Calder with his fanciful mobiles and stabiles is perfect for discussing this concept.

Sympathetic Movement

Sympathetic movement in art involves the viewer as an active participant. Having students walk around a sculpture to see its various angles, forms, and textures helps convey this concept as does creating polyvisual designs based on the work of Yaacov Agam.

Two simple designs or photographs cut in strips, alternately arranged, pasted on paper, and folded accordion style creates a wonderful project for students interested in understanding sympathetic movement. As students move back and forth in front of the artwork it's common to hear them

respond with excitement to the different views they see.

Implied Movement

Implied movement is a sense of movement created by the placement of shapes and lines within an artwork, as well as within the subject matter itself. A dog running, a winding road, or trees bending in the breeze are subjects that clearly suggest implied movement. Add to that how and where the artist puts those images on a canvas or paper and one has a visual problem to solve.

Though implied movement is easy to understand, creating an effective composition can be challenging for middle school students who don't have a firm grasp of informal balance and compositional techniques. The following painting project proved successful in combining concepts of implied movement, composition, and color.

Capturing Movement in a Painting

Students began by brainstorming things that move: hands, cars, animals, etc. Students then looked for

visual resources to help them sketch their subject matter accurately. Magazines, websites, and visual dictionaries proved helpful.

A lesson on creating strong composition was provided to encourage creative use of space. Focus was given to the placement, direction, or angle of objects, and the use of positive and negative space. Overlapping shapes was encouraged as was having some objects appear to go off the edge of the page. "Where is your eye leading you?" was a frequently asked question.

After compositions were lightly drawn on 12 x 18" (30 x 45 cm) watercolor paper and outlined in permanent black marker, students were encouraged to use color in a way that enhanced the concept of movement. Some students incorporated gradations of color washes in their piece; others used monochromatic color schemes to show movement from light to dark. Others took advantage of patterns in their designs to show various color changes. Watercolor paints were used, but acrylic, tempera, colored pencil,

marker, or a combination of media could be used as well.

I was very pleased with the results, as students demonstrated their understanding of movement in uniquely personal ways. The subject matter mirrored the emotional and social aspects of this age group: crashing planes, schools of fish, battle scenes, erupting volcanoes, and firefighters dousing fires.

Working with active middle school students can be challenging and exhausting at times. Having students channel their energy in unique and creative ways resulted in a positive and moving experience for everyone involved. ☺

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks.

WEB LINK

www.websterschools.org/webpages/mcoy