Pirated Art

Sharon Gray and Elicia Gray

Most middle-school students have seen at least one of the recent *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies. Art teachers can connect with this pop culture phenomenon to capture students' imagination and enthusiasm for some pirate-related art experiences.

Inspiration
A few short movie scenes—laced with Johnny Depp's irrepressible humor—will get students laughing and excited. To increase sensory involvement, we darkened the room and passed around such delicacies as monkey brains (wet spaghetti), eyeballs (peeled grapes), and pirate slime (made of borax, water, and glue).

Most people don't think of pirates as artists, but some of the things we associate most closely with them actually involved some design skill and artistic ingenuity.

Flags
A pirate ship's flag, also known as the "Jolly Roger," was designed to instill fear in sailors. The captain would choose images to represent the impression he wanted to make on a potential enemy. The traditional skull and crossbones were meant to frighten and intimidate. To personalize the concept and the process, you can create and display a flag with your own personal symbols. Students can explore together what has been represented in the designs.

Designate Student Groups
Split the class into "crews" of four-to-seven students. Let each group select a name for its crew and create a flag. To encourage our students to think beyond battle symbols, we suggested that a crew of hungry pirates might have the Jolly Roger skull eating a hot dog or that a crew of tidy pirates might arrange a broom, duster, and mop pail around cross-bone arms.

Flag Design and Construction
The process for making the flags is one the groups can do themselves with a clear demonstration and teacher supervision,

1. Choose symbols to represent the crew and sketch a flag design.
2. Choose a solid background fabric and cut it in a rectangular shape.
3. Choose contrasting fabric for details and place an iron-on adhesive onto the wrong side of it.
4. Using an iron on the "silk" setting, press on the paper side of the adhesive for one or two seconds.
5. Draw symbols and designs onto the adhesive paper; draw in reverse, as they will be transferred paper-side-down onto the background fabric.
6. After the adhesive cools, peel off paper backing.
7. Place symbols and designs on the background fabric—adhesive side against the fabric. Iron gently for four to six seconds.
8. Use fabric markers to add details.
9. Use a glue gun to attach the completed flag to a wooden dowel.

Scarves
Many captains and crews represented themselves as individuals by the scarves they wore. Most pirates used any scrap of fabric they found, but as they plundered ships, they confiscated more elaborate materials, including elaborate batiks from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Batik is a wax-resist technique for dying fabric with individual designs. Students may create their own batik pirate scarves with designs that reflect their interests, values, or culture.

1. For the dye resist, melt colored crayons into the sections of a muffin tin on a small hot plate with teacher supervision.
2. Cut fabric and apply wax with cotton swabs.
3. Dye fabric with diluted acrylic paint.
4. After fabric is dry, remove the wax by placing the scarf between layers of newsprint and pressing with a warm iron.
5. Soak the scarf in fabric softener, rinse, dry, and iron.

With banners to rally around and scarves to hold up their pants and keep their faces dry, the middle-school buccaneers will be ready to sail. Finish off with a display or improvised drama. ✎

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NATIONAL STANDARD

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

WEB LINKS

www.offthedeepend.com/c-50-flags-and-pennants.aspx

www.expat.or.id/info/batik.html