

**Sarah Grow**

**P**icture this: You set up in the front of the room a basic still-life. The still life consists of a bowl, two apples, an artichoke, a potato, and a tin of mints. You tell your students that they have five minutes to draw this still life with a set of pastels and a sheet of paper. Grumbles roll through the room. You prompt them to begin and off they go.

About a minute into the exercise, you nonchalantly saunter up to the display, take a bite out of one of the apples, move the potato to the opposite side, and listen as your students protest. You ignore their complaints



Left: Finished sample of a not-so-still life drawing. Right: Sarah drawing the not-so-still life.

# THE NOT-SO-STILL LIFE

and remind them that they have four minutes or so to finish.

As the next minute approaches, you take another bite out of an apple, switch the tin of mints and the artichoke, and listen again to the grumbles of your students. They begin to catch on, however, and move on. At the third minute, you empty the bowl, flip it upside down, and rearrange the fruits and vegetables.

By the fourth minute, there is not much left of the apple, and the bowl is right-side-up again. As you stop your students on the fifth minute, the complaints are done and so are their drawings. Welcome to the not-so-still life.

## Ten Lessons

After reading Elliot Eisner's, *Ten Lessons the Arts Teach*, I wanted to develop an activity that would exemplify one or more of Eisner's ideas. I chose to focus on the fourth lesson, which states, "The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem-

solving, purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity. Learning in the arts requires the ability and willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds."

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As I began to think about what I would do for this activity, I was reminded of the quick gesture drawing exercises from the first drawing classes I took. They

had nearly all been figurative drawings, but I thought it would be interesting to couple that with a still life. The possibilities and outcomes of this activity were so exciting to me that I could hardly wait to try it out on my fellow art education classmates.

I executed the activity as outlined in the first paragraph, with very little instruction except that the exercise would last only five minutes. Students quickly adapted, and the results were wonderful. Each person chose a different way to deal with the problems I gave them, and all the compositions were unique.

While reflecting upon the activity, one student said, "It forced me to make a decision right away and to draw quickly." Another said, "I just tried to keep the original composition in my mind and to work at it that way." Whatever approach the student chooses, the activity brings a new perspective to the static still life and embraces the unanticipated results.

## Objectives

Students will:

- thoughtfully investigate and question the concept of still life.
- demonstrate a willingness to accept unanticipated possibilities.

*Sarah Grow is a senior pre-service art education student at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.*

## NATIONAL STANDARD

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

## WEB LINK

[www.naea-reston.org/advocacy/10-lessons-the-arts-teach](http://www.naea-reston.org/advocacy/10-lessons-the-arts-teach)