

Catching Colorful CHAGALL



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The introduction of the *FISH!* philosophy to our school was not only a wonderful addition to the classroom interpersonal and management dynamic, but from a visual arts teacher point of view, *FISH!* was a completely irresistible subject for this first-grade lesson.

Day One

Start with a poem or a book to inspire the creative process. You could also share a reading from Mary O'Neill's *Hailstones and Halibut Bones*, or *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss. The readings serve as a bridge to looking at the vibrant and powerful artworks of Fauvist Russian painter Marc Chagall.

Marc Chagall embraced the philosophy that love colored his paintings. Focusing extensively on his childhood, his happy, optimistic paintings defy the poverty of his upbringing. Share and discuss Chagall's artworks.

Once you explain that students will concentrate on the element of color (imaginary color schemes specifically), they are free to explore the subject matter—in this case, fish—the shape of which is easily recognizable by even the youngest of artists.

Students don't need much prompting to begin their creations. Have students use 9 x 12" sketch paper to complete two fish designs, one on one side of the paper and one on the other. Finally, have them place a star on the side of the paper containing the drawing they want to use for their final painting.

Day Two

Hand out the drawings from the previous class and revisit the subject of the fish and discuss the qualities of their drawings. Distribute 18 x 24" paper

and discuss the transfer of their original small idea to the larger paper.

Now comes the fun part—demonstrating the painting process! I love the vibrancy of acrylic paint and the natural painterly effect it has in the hands of young artists. Place all the colors that students will need in plastic ice cube trays. One or two trays placed at each table works great and the trays can be covered with foil and stacked for storage. The paint will keep for weeks in the tray. When finished, soak the trays overnight and the paint will come right out.

Using big brushes, demonstrate the proper use of the materials (explaining the permanency of acrylic paint on fabrics to little artists is crucial). I like to discuss the visibility of the brushstrokes and the painterly quality of the paint, but the painterly quality will happen naturally with little artists. I usually have one brush for each of the colors on the table so that there is no risk of mixing colors on one brush and contaminating the palettes. If it looks like the brushes are becoming saturated, I have students carefully bring them to the sink so I can wash and replace them.

Day Three

Most students finish the large fish painting on the third day, completing the fish first and then moving onto the background colors. Assessment can focus on informal class discussion or the more formal rubric.

Be prepared: Once this project has been displayed and the parents and the school community get a look at how fabulous the finished works are, you will have to add this lesson to your repertoire every year! 🐟

“How will your choice of attitude today translate to the color scheme you choose?”

—*FISH!* Philosophy

The Big Idea

Active participation in the visual arts leads to an understanding of the imaginative and creative process.

Enduring Understanding

Artists sometimes break with established traditions to better express what they see and feel.

Essential Question

How do an artist's experiences influence their creative process?

Explain to students that the Fauves were early twentieth-century modern artists whose works emphasized abstraction, painterly qualities and strong color. If you introduce the Fauves as “Wild Beasts,” children will remember that term as well as the fact that this was the first modern movement to use color as a powerful emotional force.

Materials

- 9 x 12" (23 x 30 cm) sketch paper
- pencils
- erasers
- 18 x 24" (46 x 61 cm) white drawing paper
- acrylic or tempera paint
- 1" (2.54 cm) and 2" (5 cm) paint brushes
- ice cube trays and foil to cover
- paint shirts/smocks
- images of Marc Chagall's works (particularly images with animals)
- images of fish (optional)