



Rachel Podnar, grade ten, Me.



Craig Davis, grade ten, Scream.

Finger-Painted **FACES**

Michelle Flandera Surrena

Finger painting is often believed to be an activity for young children. I challenged this idea when I presented my high-school painting class with a project that required them to paint entirely with their fingers. The origin of this project evolved from a lesson Sarah Pinto, a former student-teacher, and I created several years ago. Consequently, as I further developed the lesson throughout the years to meet the changing needs of my students, it proved to be invaluable as students learned about paint texture, mark-making, value, and blending paint.

Creating Grids

We first studied Chuck Close's artwork and discussed the integral dependency of his portraits to the grid system he incorporated. Students also observed the importance of detail, pattern, and consistency of technique throughout his work. With these ideas in mind, I took pictures of each student in front of a draped cloth, which provided a simple background. Students picked their favorite

pose and I printed the photo in black-and-white on my printer.

With a ruler and black marker, I gridded $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.25) squares on graph paper and copied this grid onto $8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11" (21.25 x 27.5) acetate, enough for each student. One $8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11"

Using their fingers, students painted each value scale using a different technique; one with dots and one with smudges using only black and white acrylic paints.

piece of acetate yielded two acetate grids when cut in half.

Students taped the acetate to their black-and-white photo, leaving an extra column on one side to use as



Shaila Meeran, *grade ten, Shaila*.

a numbering system that identified each row. The top row was similarly lettered beginning with “A.” Thus, individual squares were easily referenced using letter-number coordinates such as A3, C10, and so on. Following this, students created a 2" (5 cm) grid on large, heavy white paper and lettered and numbered the top row and end column the same as their acetate. Finally, before painting, students made a viewfinder by cutting out a 2" square from the center of a 6" (15 cm) square made of heavy railroad board.

Value Scales

Prior to painting their portrait, students were required to paint two value scales. The value scales were 2" high—the height of one square on their project—and about 20" (50 cm) in length. Using their fingers, students painted each value scale using a different technique; one with dots and one with smudges using only black and white acrylic paints. However, the goal remained constant: a smooth transition from white to

black. This process enabled students to see which technique worked best for them.

Art-Making

Once students determined their preferred technique, they chose a square on their black-and-white photo and placed their viewfinder over that specific square on their large, white board. It is important to note that students did not draw their portrait with pencil prior to painting. Using their photo as a reference, students painted square-by-square using only black and white acrylic paints.

The viewfinder isolated the square as they painted within it and also helped to ensure that the struc-

ture of the grid remained consistent throughout all areas of the composition. I encouraged students to think of each square as a mini abstract painting, similar to the work of Chuck Close. Many students found it beneficial to turn their portraits upside down to paint when they had difficulty with a specific section. This helped them see areas of the face as values rather than specific parts that were intimidating. In addition, most students found it easier to paint while standing up.

Assessment

Students had several requirements and goals for assessment. They were required to keep the grid as an integral part of their portrait; paint square-by-square with their fingers using their viewfinder to isolate each square; use their photograph as a constant reference; build up value to develop form; incorporate at least seven different values within their composition and jump from square to square as they painted so the entire composition developed at once. This

last requirement also ensured that wet areas were not smudged by the viewfinder since it covered the neighboring squares surrounding the isolated opening.

As students neared completion, they hung their portraits on the wall, which allowed them to stand at a distance and view their work. Thus, they could see where adjustments in value, proportion, and placement needed to be made. Surprisingly, students developed an appreciation for finger painting and realized the benefits and limitations of their hands as a tool.

Though I only taught my Painting I students forty minutes a day, I felt as though my class remained constantly with me once their finished portraits were displayed in my room. Similarly, as other classes came in throughout the day, students recognized the artwork of their peers. Their comments, excitement, and conversation regarding the gridded portraits reinforced the value of this lesson. 🌀

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

WEB LINK

www.chuckclose.coe.uh.edu

Materials

- black and white acrylic paints
- camera/digital camera
- printer or a method to develop your film
- pencils
- rulers
- heavy-duty white board
- acetate
- X-Acto knives
- graph paper, clear tape
- railroad or poster board