# UNDERWATER WONDERS

*Mary Coy*

Having fallen into a fountain at a shopping mall as a young girl, I've always been a bit afraid of the water; as a result, snorkeling was way out of my comfort zone. But I tried it, reluctantly, forty years later. Wow! Had I known there was a great art project waiting for me underwater, I'd have donned my flippers and snorkel sooner! This new world of tropical fish, coral, and sponges inspired me to bring this unique experience back to my students.

Prior to diving in, my sixth-graders were formally introduced to the elements of art and principles of design, specifically color, space, variety, repetition, and balance. We looked at landscape photographs to identify the foreground, middle ground, and background, and the balance of objects within the space.

To set the stage for our project, the next class began with tropical music playing, my underwater photos scrolling in a PowerPoint slideshow, and a new class pet—a fancy goldfish swimming in a comfortably furnished fishbowl complete with fake coral, seaweed, and rocks.

## Creating the Underwater Setting

I began the project by demonstrating the wet-on-wet technique using watercolors, and then asked students to create a background using a cool color scheme. Next, the foreground was created by tearing paper into long, wavy strips to represent layers of sand.

From a bowl of broken chalks and pastels, neutral colors were chosen and applied to the top edge of the paper and rubbed with a tissue to create a soft look. Texture was added to the surface with real sea sponges and a bit more watercolor. The sand was layered and glued to the background.



*Peter Mallery, grade six.*

## Visual Resources

To help educate my students on the importance of coral reefs within our ecosystem, I turned to online sources for information and images. Students read about the coral reef, identified the oceans of the world, and matched various corals, sponges, and other sea life with their proper names. I created a PowerPoint presentation of life in the coral reef to use as a visual resource while students worked on the next step: painting the coral and modeling the fish.

## Adding Sea Life

Another demonstration was given in using the variety of brushes available. The thin edge of a square brush worked well for creating tube coral and large, wavy seaweed and small round brushes worked well for tree coral, brain coral, and other details. When completed, the assortment of sea life was carefully trimmed, arranged to show balance in height, color, and shape, and then glued down into the sand.

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## Modeling Fish

Lightweight modeling compound was used to create fish that looked as authentic as possible. Visuals of various fish helped guide students as they modeled on their own. Students who had difficulty modeling were allowed to trace an image of a fish with pencil and transfer it to a flattened piece of

*Abbey Rockwell, grade six.*



*Melanie Copey, grade six.*

development of space, artistry, and class participation and effort. The results were as individual and colorful as the fish in the ocean and the process as fun as snorkeling. Truly, all students showed interest in this exploration and showed pride in their work.

Lesson learned: Don't be afraid to go out of your comfort zone. You'll never know what you're missing if you don't. ❧

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modeling compound by flipping the image over and rubbing it with their hands. The fish was then cut out and details were added to make it more original.

Students needed to independently demonstrate at least two more color schemes and patterns as they painted the fish with acrylic paint. Once dried, the fish were arranged to show balance and movement and glued down. Small shells and aquarium stones were added for more authenticity.

**Evaluation**

In their assessment, students were asked to identify the color schemes, patterns, and types of corals they included. Other areas assessed were