



# Drawing with SCISSORS

Nancy Walkup

*“What I dream of is an art of balance.”* Henri Matisse

**A**t the beginning of every school year, I introduce primary colors, organic shapes, and positive and negative space in one of my favorite lessons for third or fourth grade, using the work of Henri Matisse as an example.

In his later years, despite serious illness, Henri Matisse worked from his bed or from a wheelchair. When he could no longer paint at his easel, he had his assistants paint pieces of paper, which he then cut into shapes, drawing only with scissors. He directed the placement of these

cutouts on his wall until they were arranged to his satisfaction.

## Motivation

Show and discuss examples of Matisse's collages. Tell the story of how he began to paint paper and then cut shapes from it when he was ill and confined to bed. Demonstrate procedures for freehand cutting of organic shapes with positive and negative spaces.

## Step One

Distribute white and black papers and explain that the white paper will become the background for

the collage. Students should cut out an interesting shape from one end of the black paper, “drawing” with the scissors. Leaf- or flower-like shapes work well, but the result should be only two pieces of paper. (When I demonstrate this process, I compare the positive and negative shapes that result to addition and subtraction.) Ask students to carefully glue the two frame-like pieces in

## Vocabulary

- composition
- primary colors
- geometric and organic shapes
- positive and negative space
- balance

## Objectives

Students will:

- demonstrate an accurate recognition of organic shapes in artworks.
- demonstrate an accurate recognition of the primary colors.
- distinguish between positive and negative space.
- create an effective composition using overlapping shapes and colors.

## Materials

- reproductions of collages by Henri Matisse and other artists who use collage
- 12 x 18" (30.5 x 46 cm) white drawing paper
- 6 x 9" (15 x 23 cm) black construction paper, two per student
- 6 x 9" (15 x 23 cm) or 9 x 12" (23 x 30.5 cm) red, yellow, and blue construction paper
- pencils
- scissors
- white glue

opposite corners of the paper. Then direct them to glue down the two remaining pieces.

## Step Two

Distribute one color of either red, yellow, or blue paper.

Ask students to cut organic shapes from the paper, thinking in terms of both positive and nega-

tive shapes. Have students arrange these cut-out shapes, both positive and negative, in a balanced composition over the black and white paper and then glue them in place. The colored shapes should not touch each other and all the pieces of color paper should be used in the composition.

Repeat this process for each of the other colors, one color at a time. Subsequent colors can overlap other colors, but the same color shapes should still not touch. Encourage students to remain aware of the negative spaces in their compositions as they work. ☺

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## NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students will understand and apply media, techniques, and processes.*

## WEB LINKS

[www.artbma.org/education/matisse\\_kids\\_frame.html](http://www.artbma.org/education/matisse_kids_frame.html)

[www.musee-matisse-nice.org/](http://www.musee-matisse-nice.org/)