

Local Flavor: Aislinn Beinlich, grade nine; Kiara Callender, grade nine; Brittany MacNeil, grade eleven.



# THE SYNECTICS PROJECT

Christopher Sweeney

For more than fourteen years I have been teaching a seminar art class at Academy Park High School in Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania. Last year I was very fortunate to be allowed to create my own curriculum.

For years I had been using a book called *Design Synectics: Stimulating Creativity in Design*, by Nicholas Roukes (Davis Publications, 1988) to supplement my curriculum. I decided to use *Design Synectics*, along with Roukes's other book, *Art Synectics: Stimulating Creativity in Art* (Davis Publications, 1984), as well as online materials on synectics to organize my class curriculum. I also chose to have students decide which projects they wanted to focus on.

## Student Choice

To start the year, students brainstormed ideas for projects they would

like to work on. I came up with some projects I felt would tie into the synectics books and available materials, but students came up with the ideas for the bulk of the projects. Students then voted on the projects, ranking them in order of popularity. In the end they chose eighteen projects to focus on throughout the school year. While this seminar class was shorter than regular core classes, these exceptional students worked very hard on their work inside and outside of class.

## Projects

Students worked on the following [partial] list of projects throughout the year:

- Metamorphosis drawing
- Ukiyo-e (linoleum block) print-making
- Designing two-dimensional and three-dimensional tents/living project

- Combining organic and non-organic drawing
- Drawing Greek myths (or other cultures)
- Paradox/humor, prevarication
- Drawing/painting
- Time/progression drawing
- Bookmaking

We bounced around *Design Synectics*, using it in a nonlinear manner to serve our needs. We used a variety of materials, ideas, and concepts, worrying less about the elements and principles of art and focusing on the creativity of the lesson. Artistry was always stressed, but the majority of the work was top-notch quality, so this was never an issue. Students were extremely engaged, using real life problem-solving and synectics as springboards for ideas.

## Opportunity Knocks

While students were working on the time/progression unit, a unique and exciting opportunity presented itself. I had previously applied for the Van's Custom Culture sneaker contest, and we were one of 2,000 schools that were picked to participate. Vans gave us four pairs of sneakers, as well as design templates. The class was split

Art: Chantal Diallo, grade ten; India Silmon-Robinson, grade ten; Ta'morra Warren, grade ten.

Music: Aisha Abdul-Malik, grade nine; and Kimberley Dowell, grade eleven.



into four teams, and each team was instructed to pick one of four themes to represent on their shoes: art, music, action sports, or local flavor.

Students began by brainstorming and creating thumbnail sketches, constantly discussing how they would achieve their designs. They worked together on the final concepts and decided on what would be included in the final shoe design and painting.

Throughout the process, they researched images, referenced

photos in art books, and used classroom technology to enhance their research and designs. Using basic materials such as pencils, rulers, permanent markers, and paint, students brought their designs to life beautifully. They worked diligently during class, lunch, after school, as well as at home.

### An Authentic Experience

The results of the contest have not been announced, but regardless of

how students do, I am so very proud of them for working on a tight deadline and making some awesome art that the world, as well as our community, can

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see. They worked as a group, worked alone, and completed a project with ties to the real world, including real-life problem solving.

As with our other synectics projects, students were extremely engaged, because even though I assigned the Vans project, they made it their own, and it was an authentic experience that tied into their life and their interests. This is what makes for a genuine art experience that will last a lifetime. 🌀



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### NATIONAL STANDARD

Creating: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.

### WEB LINK

[www.sedelco.org/Domain/584](http://www.sedelco.org/Domain/584)