



Huntington and Scott Gallery Programs

DISCOVERING ART: THE SHAPE OF ART

An Investigation into the Use of Shapes in Art



Grades K–3

I. Introduction

With line and color, shape is one of the fundamental elements of art. Artists use shapes in their work for different purposes: to convey meaning, to provide balance, as the fundamental form of an object for which they later provide more detail, or just as shapes themselves. This activity will develop awareness of shapes in art.

II. Objective

- ◆ Students will be able to identify and discuss shapes as principle visual elements in art. The students will develop skills in observation, composition, and will be able to create and discuss their own artwork in the context of shape.

III. Standards Assessed

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- ◆ Identify the elements and principles of the visual arts as seen in the environment and in works of art. Create original works of art in a variety of media, using a variety of techniques.

Visual Arts Standards, California Department of Education

Standard 1. Artistic Perception: Processing, analyzing, and responding to sensory information through the language and skills unique to the arts.

- Standard 2. Creative Expression: Creating, performing and participating in the arts.
- Standard 4: Aesthetic Valuing: Responding to, analyzing, and making judgments about art works.
- Standard 5: Connections, Relations, Applications: Connecting and applying what is learned in each art form to learning in other art forms, subject areas, and careers.

IV. Materials Needed

- ◆ A selection of images of works of art—paintings, sculptures, artistic photographs, that show strong use of shape (art magazines are excellent sources). Since the emphasis is on shape and not color, black and white photocopies work fine.
- ◆ Photocopies of images of paintings or photographs with lots of shapes, one for each student
- ◆ Tracing paper
- ◆ Soft lead pencils and erasers
- ◆ Colored pencils, markers, or crayons
- ◆ Brightly colored construction paper
- ◆ Glue
- ◆ Scissors
- ◆ Poster board

V. Preparation

Create an art gallery in your classroom using images of various art works – both 2- and 3-dimensional (e.g. paintings, photographs, sculpture, etc.) Try to find examples that show strong use of shapes. Vary the artwork from representational to abstract, and be sure to include art from a variety of cultures and styles (certain types of African art e.g. that of the Ndebele people of southern Africa, and Northwest Coast American Indian art are particularly striking in their use of shapes. And don't forget Picasso and the Cubists, and Matisse's cutouts!). Try to also use images of artwork that the students will see on their visit to the Huntington. You can find many of these on the Huntington Web site.

VI. Lesson Activities

Part I. Pre-Visit (in the classroom)

Introduce your students to shapes. Ask them to name as many shapes as they can, and to find examples of these shapes in the classroom. Then, draw their attention to the classroom art gallery, and continue the conversation. Have the students identify as many shapes as they can that are used in the art works and to discuss how the shapes are used.

Give each student a photocopy of a painting or photograph. With their pencils, have them trace outlines of each shape in the image, directly onto the photocopy. Then, have them trace onto the tracing paper the outlines only of the shapes they find in the image. Remind them that they don't need to fill in lines for detail—the emphasis is on the basic shapes. Also remind them that their finished tracings will not look like masterpieces—this is simply an exercise to help them see shapes more easily. After they have finished tracing the shapes, they can brightly color each shape individually and post the drawings on the wall.

Part II (at the Huntington)

During their visit to the Huntington, the students will be introduced by their docent to the use of line, shape and color in art. Ask the students to try to remember as many shapes as they can that they see at the Huntington. Which paintings did the docent use as an example of the use of shape? Which painting did each student like best for its use of shape? And which, of all the artwork they saw, was their favorite?

Part III. Post Visit (in the classroom)

Discussion

Kindergarten: Discuss with the students their favorite painting or sculpture.

1. Why was it their favorite?
2. What different shapes did they see in this artwork?
3. Where else do they see these same shapes in their own environment?

Grades One and Two: Have the students compare and contrast the way that different artists use shape. They can also compare the images from the Huntington to those in the "classroom gallery."

1. What was their favorite painting at the Huntington, and what shapes did they see in it?
2. Where else do they see these same shapes in their own environment?

Grade Three: After a discussion using questions listed above, have the students write about the painting that they like best at the Huntington.

1. How did the artist use shape?
2. Was the painting a portrait? Landscape?
3. What shapes did they see in the painting?
4. Why did they like this artwork the best?
5. Compare and contrast their favorite work to one in the classroom gallery that is a different style (e.g. representational vs. abstract).