

Art Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan: Positive/Negative Mask

Grade: Third

Curriculum content: Pacific Northwest Coastal Native Americans

Element(s): space, shape

Technique: collage, cutting

Art EALRs: 1.1.1. Identifies and uses the spatial concepts of positive/negative space.

Objective: Students will explore the relationship between positive and negative space in art.



Discussion/Questions

Art Element(s): Space, Shape

- What is space in a piece of art? What is the “subject” in a piece of art? Does a subject have shape? What do you think about all the other parts, the non-subject? Do they have shape?
- There are two different kinds of space in art: positive space and negative space. Positive space is the space occupied by the subject in an artwork and the negative space is all the areas around the subject, or the background. Of course the subject has a shape, as in a tree or a person, but shapes are also created by the space around the subject, and it is determined by the shape of the positive space. Good design always uses both positive and negative space. Think about successful logos, such as the FedEx logo. Did you ever notice the arrow that is created between the E and the X? The Pacific Northwest Coastal Native Americans also used positive/negative space in their designs on masks, totem poles, woodcarvings, baskets, instruments, etc.

During slides or showing of painting ask/discuss about art elements and principles of design:

- How did the artist use positive and negative space? Color?
- How is it arranged? (symmetrical, repetition of shapes, patterns are used)

- How does this artwork make you feel?
- What do you think it is made out of?

Title of Artwork: *Mask Representing Ancestral Sun*



Kwakwaka'wakw, Richard Hunt, *Mask Representing Ancestral Sun*, 1978, 50.5 x 58.0 x 20.0cm, red cedar, nylon twine, screws and paint.

Artist Biography and information:

Native Americans of this region have produced a rich legacy of carved and painted objects as complex and diverse as the histories of the peoples who produced them. Among these objects the ceremonial mask has long played a vital role in preserving the stories, values, privileges, and status of their owners and makers.

Masks are a manifestation of powerful ancestral spirits and are used to make the supernatural world visible. The earliest masks collected in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were often human face masks representing spirits which descend from the heavens and assume human form. It was only after the 1850's that masks depicting animals and supernatural creatures became predominant in collectors closets. These animals and creatures are represented within the four dimensions of the cosmos as perceived by Native Americans of the Northwest Coast, that is, the celestial world, the mortal world, the undersea world and the spirit world.

Resource: The Portland Art Museum.

Materials:

- Black construction paper (9x12)
- Different colors of construction paper (9x6) Consider using traditional colors (red, yellow,

blue, white, and black, perhaps orange and green, too).

- Scissors
- Glue sticks

Preparation:

- Cut colored papers to 9x6.
- Cut small pieces of black and colored paper to 4½ x 6 for embellishing mask

Directions:

1. Discussion: include questions on space and shape. Show and discuss masks.
2. Pass out one black sheet of construction paper to each student.
3. Have them come up by table groups to pick out the second color of paper they would like to work with. Wait to have them get small pieces until step 11.
4. Have students fold the black sheet the hotdog way.
5. Have them draw the outline shape of the mask they want to make on their colored piece. Tell them the shape they are drawing is only half of the mask shape, so do not draw a round face shape think about and draw half a face shape. They can add horns, points, rounded curves, etc. But make sure that they make their outline **BIG**, using up most of the space of the 9x6 sheet (otherwise, the mask is small and difficult to work with). Tell them you want the outline shape to touch (or almost touch the bottom, top, and sides somewhere).
6. After they draw the half outline to their mask, have them place the half colored sheet on top of the black folded sheet by lining up the folded black edge with what will be center of the mask shape o the colored piece. Make sure that students align the proper edge (the folded edge), or they will not have a full mask.
7. Have students cut out the line, which will make the background mask full shape in the black paper, and they will have half on the colored sheet.
8. Have them lay the colored piece on top of the black to see how it will look.
9. Now have them draw face shapes on the colored sheet (one eye, a nose, half a mouth). Suggest they make the shapes kind of big (otherwise, they make small shapes that are difficult to cut).
10. Have them cut out those shapes. Lay the cut shape on the black background mask shape on one side, and the cut out colored sheet on the other side, so that they will get a positive/negative effect that is symmetrical.
11. Glue colored pieces onto black mask shape.
12. Have students get a 4½ x 6 piece of black and the color that they are working with.
13. Have students embellish their mask further by making designs within the face by adding cheeks, eyebrows, lips, etc. Have them draw the shape on the small colored piece, but when they cut the shape out, they need to hold together both small pieces (black and colored) so that two symmetrical shapes are cut at the same time, one black and one colored. Suggest they some of the big, small shapes are difficult to work with. *Require* that they continue to add shapes to their mask.
14. Have them glue down both shapes on the opposite background for the positive/negative effect.
15. Names in the back.
16. Mount if desired on a larger sheet.