

Playing with **POSITIVE** and **NEGATIVE** Space

by Angela Wilkins

As an elementary-school “teacher-on-call,” I am often asked to teach art and provide my own lessons. I have found it quite useful to carry lessons with me that can be completed in one class session, require very little materials, are adaptable to a variety of grade levels and require no follow-up by the regular teacher. One such lesson that I have used frequently deals with positive and negative space, as well as introducing design strategies.

A fundamental part of art is learning to see things differently. Most students that I have taught had no idea that there was more than one kind of space. By introducing students to this concept, we teach them to begin looking at things in an alternate fashion. It is a step toward more complex ideas and also teaches them to observe the world around them in a different way.

I begin the lesson by introducing the idea of pos-

itive and negative space. We then discuss the use of variety and repetition as design strategies. Students think about how each strategy can add interest to a picture.

I then provide a choice of stencil shapes. These can be cheaply and easily made by tracing and cutting sets out of inexpensive plastic place mats. Students trace their stencils onto a piece of 8½" x 11" paper. They are encouraged to position their stencil shapes in an interesting fashion.

Once the stencil shapes are complete, students choose two colors of felt pens with which to decorate. I limit the choice so students will focus on the design strategies we have talked about rather than color. Nevertheless, if a student has an idea where they would like to use more colors,

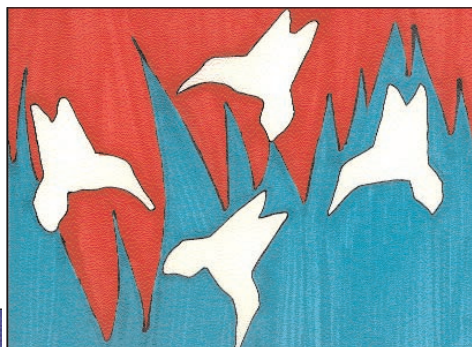
I allow them to present their idea to me for approval.

As soon as their choices have been made, students begin to work on their designs. For this activity, students concentrate on developing the negative space around the stencil shapes into an interesting design. They are instructed to leave the stencil shapes themselves blank. Every bit of the

negative space must be colored, using felt markers.

Too often students become discouraged with art and their artistic abilities. The best thing about this activity is that even the most inexperienced student is able to achieve success, and thereby gain a greater confidence in themselves and their skills. ■

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▲ Devin Clarke, grade 7.

< Morgan McKague, grade 6.

▼ Kelsey McKague, grade 6.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- learn and understand the definitions of positive and negative space.
- evaluate the use of variety and repetition as design strategies.
- use stencils to compliment a design.
- create an original design using limited colors.

MATERIALS



- Variety of stencil shapes
- 8½" x 11" card stock
- Felt markers

