



Skyscrapers are magnificent feats of engineering. Since the ancient times of pyramids, people have been striving to design buildings that are taller, bigger and better than the last one, pushing the bubble of possibilities involving form and function. A lesson creating a cityscape is not only genuinely fun, but uses multiple learning opportunities involving art history, art careers and the elements of design.

PART ONE: THE DRAWING LESSON To introduce this lesson, we took a “drawing tour” of a city and practiced drawing building shapes. We are fortunate to have the beautiful skyline of Minneapolis close by, so I created a virtual tour of the city on PowerPoint from researching local Web sites. If you don’t have a local city for reference, you could put together resources from famous skyscrapers around the world.

- < Luci C.
- ✓ Emma W.



WARM

COOL

CITYSCAPES

by Teri Dexheimer Joyce

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Primary through elementary students will ...

- appreciate variety of designs in buildings.
- recognize famous skyscrapers around the world.
- understand the role of an architect in building design.
- identify and differentiate between warm and cool colors.
- experiment with color mixing within a color family.

MATERIALS

- Pencils
- 12" x 18" sketching paper and pencils
- Crayons
- 18" x 24" heavy paper
- Bucket or tub of crayons for group-sorting activity
- Tempera paints
- Paintbrushes (we used #7 and #2)
- 5" x 7" foam trays with paper liners
- Rinse bowls and paper towels



▲ Lynley N.
◀ Amy F.



DESIGN ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES

- Space:** Overlapping shapes show depth in the city.
- Shape:** Geometric shapes form buildings and windows.
- Variety:** Building and window shapes do not all look the same.
- Pattern:** Window lines and shapes create patterns.
- Color:** The drawing is painted with either the warm or cool color family.

word “variety” now came into play. The city will look more interesting if windows of different buildings have a variety of shapes. We also learned that windows could be drawn individually or as intersecting lines and grids, and noticed how the cities came alive with patterns.

PART TWO: THE PAINTING LESSON After spending three art classes working on drawing, we were ready for something new. Children entered the art room and were presented with a gallery of prints that showed paintings representing the warm and cool color families. Examples ranged from a warm ballet studio by Degas to a cool rain forest by Rousseau. Looking at the color wheel, we identified the major warm and cool colors.

To reinforce understanding, the students were asked to do a cooperative activity involving a bucket of crayons. Each table of students took a bucket and sorted the colors into two piles, one to represent the warm color family and one for the cool colors. This allowed them to discuss and rationalize how the colors fit. Once they understood the color families, the children were ready to paint.

Students chose the color family that they wanted to work with, and had a wonderful time discovering what new colors they could create by mixing them together. In addition to the colors, the neutral color white was also used for mixing.

Mixing many different colors allows young artists to gain experience using a color palette. We used a foam tray with

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After defining what an architect is, we looked for simple geometric shapes in buildings. Using 12" x 18" sketching paper, we drew the outer shapes of the buildings and discussed them in the language we know: “That one has a triangle shape at the top!” “This one looks like stair steps!”

From sketching during the tour, children anywhere from first to third grade learned how to draw beyond a basic rectangle, to draw buildings that had steps, curves, corners, and domes. At this point, however, we did not yet discuss or draw windows and details.

In our next class, the young architects were eager to start creating their own city. Drawing on 18" x 24" paper with a crayon, the city started to grow. To create a sense of space and perspective, we put a small mark halfway up the paper. The first row of buildings was drawn at this level on the paper or lower, in order to save room behind them for more buildings. The concept of overlapping shapes developed as two or more additional layers of buildings were created until the skyline was complete.

Once the buildings were in place, it was time to discuss details. We brainstormed different shapes of windows and looked for examples in the PowerPoint slide show. The

CITYSCAPES a paper liner
continued from page 39 from recycled
copier paper.

The goal was to mix small amounts of colors on the palette—and not make “paint soup,” which can get out of hand and wastes a lot of paint.

In working with these small palettes, we poured paint no larger than the size of a nickel and then added a few drops for mixing. At the end of the class, the paper liner is thrown in the trash, and a new liner is placed in the tray for someone else to use. Containers for water and paper towels were used to rinse brushes any time it was necessary.

Once the paintings were completed, some paintings needed another “overdrawing.” I explained that we started with a detailed drawing, but sometimes when you paint over it, the drawing gets covered up with paint. You may need to put the drawing back again to see the original designs. This is a great tool for young painters who have a very lively painting, but lost their city. It helps to ensure a successful outcome.

During our painting sessions, students were introduced to famous skyscrapers from around the world. The book *Skyscrapers*, by Judith Dupre (Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc., 1996), has good photographs and information about skyscrapers from the Chrysler building in New York, to the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur. Other books to consider sharing are *Unbuilding*, by David Macaulay (Houghton Mifflin/Walter Lorraine Books, 1980), and biographies that focus on architects such as Cesar Pelli.

An article in a local newspaper once interviewed area architects and asked them specifically what had inspired them to become architects. The majority of them spoke about the impact of some architectural experience they had in elementary art classes.

Look for opportunities in your curriculum to teach architectural concepts. Encourage your media specialist to purchase books about architecture. Tell your students to start looking skyward and thinking big. The next great architect could be that first-grader who just walked through the art-room door! ■

Teri Dexheimer Joyce is an art specialist at Highlands Elementary School in Edina, Minnesota.