

Let the fun begin! In my high-school art class, the students paint with cotton swabs, using a vast palette of colors that reflects the richness of Aboriginal culture.

We begin with a video called *Aboriginal Art—Past, Present and Future*, which explores the art of Australia's Aborigines, from prehistoric cave art to the contemporary paintings. I show this video because it is informative, captures the students' interest and is brief—only 13 minutes in length. The class then shares their thoughts about the video, and I give them books and posters to study, making note of the use of symbols and stories in Aboriginal painting.

We then view, discuss and analyze contemporary Aboriginal artists such as Bridget Mudijidell, Albert Nago-mara and Sandy Gordon. The class enjoys a slide show of former students'

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- increase their awareness about Aboriginal art and artists.
- develop understanding of what different Aboriginal symbols mean.
- incorporate the elements of design and composition in their paintings.
- understand how to place dots on canvas to create patterns.
- apply paint with nontraditional tools.
- learn about the properties of color such as hue, intensity, value, shade and tint.
- identify a color scheme by using colors from the color wheel.
- increase ability to experiment with color and use it expressively.



Laura Greenwood (above and left)

paintings to get their ideas flowing, and then I read a few stories, beautifully presented in the book, *Tjarany Roughtail: The Dreaming of the Roughtail Lizard and Other Stories*, by Gracie Green, et al (International Specialized Book Service, 2000).

Paper and pencils are passed out for each student to make sketches of their ideas. To set the mood in the room, I always have multicultural music playing in the background while the students are working. The students are required to make between three and six rough sketches of different ideas.

Like the Aborigines, my students get their images from animals, human symbols, fish, reptiles, body markings, weapons and farming. I put out folders with as many examples of these kinds of images as I possibly can for students to use as resources. The students must

Aboriginal Adventure

by Sherry Armstrong

think about design elements such as line, variety of shapes, space, balance, rhythm and movement. I encourage them to incorporate as many of these elements as they can.

Some students want a center of interest, such as a large bird with small shapes around it. Other students may want to tell a story with different shapes over the entire surface of their canvas. After the students' sketches are reviewed, one sketch from each

of varying sizes are dipped in the acrylic paint and dotted onto the canvas. I demonstrate to the class how to line the dots in rows like the Aboriginal artists do. Additionally, students may use the handle tips of paintbrushes to make tiny dots.

The students were quite

Daniela DiGregoria >
Neda Farjoodi v



student is chosen to be transferred with pencil onto an 18" x 24" canvas.

Many Aboriginal paintings are done in earth-tone colors, but contemporary artists use brilliant and luminescent colors because they are considered a sign of health, well-being and beauty. The students may use whatever color combinations they like.

Background color is applied to the canvas first with a brush, unless the student wants an area of the background to be white. Next, cotton swabs

absorbed at this stage, because they love painting with color and dotting. This is also where their imagination kicks in, as there is no formula to the placement, size and color of dots. The magic starts happening, and before you know it, students with varying abilities are all having fun making Aboriginal-style paintings of which they are very proud. ■

Sherry Armstrong teaches art at Viewpoint School in Calabasas, Calif.

MATERIALS

- Sketch paper
- Pencils
- Acrylic paint
- Canvas
- "Dotting" tools (cotton swabs, paintbrush tips, sanded branche tips, etc.)

RESOURCES

Books

- Berndt, C.H. and Meeks, A.R., *Pheasant and Kingfisher: Originally Told by Nganalgindja in the Gunwinggu Language*. Mondo Publishing, 1994.*
- Caruana, W., *Aboriginal Art*. Thames & Hudson Inc., 1993.*
- Finley, C., *Aboriginal Art of Australia Exploring Cultural Traditions*. The Lerner Publishing Group, 1998.*
- Green, G., Tramacchi J. and Lucille, G., *Tjarany Roughtail: The Dreaming of the Roughtail Lizards and Other Stories*. Intl. Specialized Book Service, 2000.*

Music

- *Australian Aboriginal Music*, CD.*
- *Dawn Until Dusk: Tribal Song and Didgeridoo*, CD or cassette.*

Video/Art Reproductions

- *Aboriginal Art-Past, Present and Future*, video and print set by M. Bradley.**
- *Aboriginal Art Prints*, 12-print portfolio.**

*Available from Crizmac Art & Cultural Education Materials, Inc., (800) 913-8555, www.crizmac.com, as well as through Amazon.com, bn.com and Borders.com.
**Video and both sets of prints, available from Crystal Productions, (800) 255-8628, www.crystalproductions.com.