

Who Said Giraffes Can't Dance?

by Mary Lu Lovett



Parker, age 8.

Third-graders at our school take an imaginary trip around the world as part of their classroom studies. I like to challenge students to bring new information learned in the classroom with them to the art room. This information is the basis for artistic problem-solving to enhance their critical-thinking skills. Using new information in a different way enables students to make connections between the classroom, the art room and the world. One exciting destination is the continent of Africa.

In the first art session we start our discussion by recalling the many different kinds of African animals studied in their classroom. Students mention something about each animal that makes it unique. An extensive picture file of African animals helps to provide visual clues. Which animal do they find most interesting? Students spend the rest of the class with paper and fine-tip markers drawing their favorite African animal, including the giraffe.

During the next class, I introduce a watercolor wash and wet-on-wet technique. Using student-grade watercolor paper, I load up the brush with a bright yellow color to demonstrate a wash. I wash the color on the top of the paper from left to right, always making sure to overlap, as I move down, covering the whole paper.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- recognize and use the visual arts as a form of communication.
- know and apply visual-arts materials, tools, techniques and processes.
- use paints to create a watercolor wash and wet-on-wet technique.
- represent an imaginative dancing giraffe in an African setting, based on literature.

MATERIALS

- Watercolors (yellow, brown)
- #12 brushes
- Student-grade watercolor paper
- Blue construction paper
- Black fine-tip markers
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Glue
- Oil pastels
- African animal pictures
- Book, *Giraffes Can't Dance*, by Giles Andreae and Guy Parker-Rees



Casey, age 8.

While the paint is still damp, I drop blobs of brown paint onto the wet wash, creating a random spotted pattern. As the pattern forms, students discover how watercolor painting can look like the pattern of some African animals. Following the demonstration, students complete their own spotted hide.

The third class begins by reading the book, *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae and Guy Parker-Rees (Scholastic, Inc., 2001). This engaging story features a giraffe who proves he can move to the beat of his own music. Now it's time for those students who drew the giraffe in the first class to become the experts. By sharing their drawings they reveal the special physical qualities of a giraffe: long legs and neck, oval body shape, pear-shaped head, short paintbrush-like tail and, of course, a yellow body with rich, brown spots.



Molly, age 8.

This is the perfect time for students to pretend to be dancing giraffes by moving to the beat of African drum music. As the music stops, students hold their positions to examine where their arms, legs and heads are. Now they are ready to use black markers to draw their dancing

giraffes onto the yellow spotted watercolor wash completed the day before. Each student releases his or her giraffe by cutting a little outside the marker line.

During the last class, students create an oil-pastel drawing of the African plains. Finally, each giraffe is glued to the pastel background. Movement lines are added to support the idea that their giraffes are off the ground dancing to their own rhythms. Students love to share and compare their dancing positions.

Who said giraffes can't dance? ■

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