

The core curriculum at our school includes American history. Keeping this in mind, I wanted to devote the year to the study of American artists in my fifth-grade art-history units. (Also appropriate for other grade levels.)

African-Americans played an important role in our country's history, and I wanted to illustrate their position in the visual arts. Therefore, the opening art in the unit was Aaron Douglas, a Harlem-Renaissance artist. Douglas used clean contours, stylized images, flat fields and monochromatic values to represent the origins, history and evolution of black America. The art techniques of contour lines and color-mixing to create shades and tints is a key way for fifth-grade students to gain skills and experience in drawing and painting.

We began with a discussion about the life of Aaron Douglas, and the culture of the Harlem Renaissance. Students also examined the role art plays in reflecting social and individual concerns. Students then began to talk about their own environment and what images represent their lives.

When analyzing Douglas' art with the students I spoke about contour lines, the absence of details and flat fields of color lacking shadows and highlight. Photos and prints of *The Crucifix*, *Study for God's Trombone*, *Noah's Ark* and *Aspects of Negro Life: An Idyll of the Deep South* served as visual models.

I briefly described the project: Students would first be asked to make a simple contour drawing, then place lines in

Seeing Through Value, Shades and Tints

by Xanthippi Cynthia Stylianou



▲ Julia B.

▼ Sam C.



MATERIALS

- Heavy watercolor paper (any size)
- Pencils
- Rulers
- Gouache paints
- Small, medium and large brushes
- Palettes or palette paper (for color mixing)
- Resource: *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America*. The Studio Museum in Harlem: Abradale Press, 1987.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upper-elementary students will ...

- gain experience in working with a variety of art techniques and media.
- understand the relationship between art, society and individual expression.
- learn about the Harlem Renaissance and the work of artist Aaron Douglas.
- appreciate the role art plays in American history.
- feel pride in completing a complex project.



Pelle W.



▲ Ashley J.

< Nicki A.



any direction and style over the image, or simply redraw around it, tracing it over and over until the lines go off the page (leave about 1 inch between tracings for easier painting). This gives the picture sections, much like a grid.

They would then paint the pictures with values of colors they mixed using white to create shades, and black to create tints. They were to switch colors whenever there was a new section separated by a line. Students could choose to paint one image with the same color values and change the color of paint for the next, or continue to paint a monochromatic picture (using the *values* of one color).

There are five important aspects of the lesson. First, students should draw large, simple contour images lacking detail. Then they should draw continuous lines starting at one end and reaching the other—either from top to bottom or side to side—over the image, with ample space between the lines. This will make it easier to paint and identify the multiple images they have drawn.

Second, students should choose only two to three colors for their color palette: making shades and tints of each

can mix it at that time, preventing the chance of not getting the same color value next time.

Fifth, alternate values of a color whenever there is a line separating a section. The same color should not touch or be placed next to itself. Students should shift to the next lighter or darker value of the color when separated by a line.

Although this project was done with fifth-graders, its complexity can be altered for other grade levels. The patience and multiple stages of this lesson help students appreciate the methods used in making art, while they develop experience in a variety of different techniques, such as drawing, color mixing and painting.

My students worked hard to document images of importance to them, and gained an understanding of the relationship between art, society, politics and originality. In the end, they felt very proud of their finished piece. ■

At the time of this project, Xanthippi Cynthia Stylianou was teaching art at Rowland Hall, St. Mark's Lower School in Salt Lake City, Utah. She is now living and working in Cyprus.