Primarily Paper

by Paula Guhin

Crepe paper, tissue paper, newspaper, wallpaper—if it weren't for the plethora of papers available, some of us would have hardly any art supplies at all.

Inspired by Gerald Brommer's book *Collage Techniques: A Guide for Artists and Illustrators* (Watson-Guptill Publications, Inc., 1994), I asked my high-school students to create mini-collages. About 7" x 9" in size, these artworks would be made almost exclusively from papers.

But, what choices! The variety of papers is astounding: fadeless colored papers; glossy, metallic or velour papers; rice papers; textured handmade papers; perforated or marbleized papers and more. I gathered old maps, corrugated cardboard, sheet music, colored foils, wrapping papers and Japanese papers. I added paper towels, napkins and paper doilies to the collection. I even altered construction papers by bleaching, charring or spray-painting them.

Meghan Gillis, grade 10. >

< Josh Phillips, grade 11.

I deliberately chose to exclude magazines because I desired nonobjective collages. For our "quickie" assignment (done in 80 minutes or less), I didn't want the students to concentrate on the representational aspects of these collages. Another teacher might wish to allow words and pictures.

Before we started, we placed very large pieces of plain manila paper on each desk, as a protective covering for the work surface. We did not use newspaper, as the students' compositions would be much more visible on the plain surface than on "busy" newsprint.

In order to focus student attention on color schemes, I requested limited palettes of two or three colors at the most. The artists could cut or tear curvy, rounded or angular shapes. I reminded them to create various sizes of paper pieces.

My class of beginners was not yet

Jennifer Dolejsi, grade 11. ^
Sara Benson, grade 11. v

^ Jessica Wanna, grade 12.

well versed with all the principles of design. To aid them with their compositions, I required a cruciform arrangement. As I demonstrated the cross-like format to my public-school students, I clarified that there was no religious significance to the requested design layout. I also encouraged the students to first organize their overlapping pieces and then brush medium under and over them. Using this process, our mini-collages were fast and, yet, fantastic. Evaluation was based on use of color and value, variety of sizes, balance, repetition of shapes, unity and more.

While ours were not three-dimensional assemblages, materials such as leaves or feathers could be included. Other exotic papers could also be used. For example, check the darkroom for ruined prints (glossy photo paper is *cool*). Or you might stain light-colored paper with tea, coffee or crepe paper. (Some types of crepe paper, when dampened, leave a lovely "print" behind when removed.) Finally, you could even modify paper by scarring it with sandpaper.

The ultimate endorsement comes from the kids themselves. They'll enjoy this engaged-learning activity. ■

At the time she wrote this article, Paula Guhin taught art at Central High School in Aberdeen, South Dakota, She is now retired and serves as a Contributing Editor for Arts & Activities.