

Building Unity ... and Variety

by Don Masse

For the past four years, I have done an annual collaborative art mini lesson (30 minutes) with the upper- grade students at Zamorano Fine Arts Academy. The projects provide a low-stress opportunity for the students to create.

With these collaborative projects, we focus on unity and variety—both visual and in relation to our student population. Each of our students has similarities with one another, but each of them also brings something different and unique to the table.

When searching for artwork that fits well with this type of project, I look for work that has a strong repetitive element to it. Repeated motifs or shapes can be combined within a larger whole, so that many students can participate. In the past, I have used the work of artists Lee Gainer, Georgia Gray and Lea Anderson as inspiration for these projects because of their repetition of circles in a variety of styles and mediums.



Maritza Soto's modern take on the "drunkards path" quilt pattern was a perfect fit for this project.



Talaveras tiles.

DURING A SEARCH ON PINTEREST, I came across quilter Maritza Soto's striking modern take on the "drunkards path" quilt pattern. Immediately, I knew it would be a good fit for this project. To add visual variety, I also decided to share Mexican *talavera* tile designs with my students, talking about the repetition of line, shape and color in them—and the presence of symmetry, to boot!

As a school located in San Diego, Zamorano has a large student population of

Mexican descent; this additional layer of design inspiration was appreciated by the kids.

After a quick rundown of my expectations, I talked about the inspiration for the project. We were then ready to dive into the hands-on part. At this point we had about 20 minutes to work.

Students were each given square paper, which they quartered by folding it two times. I emphasized the importance of having the edge with one fold be on the left, and the edge with two folds be on the bottom.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Elementary school students will...

- become familiar with the principles of unity and variety in art.
- gain experience creating a collaborative art project that enhances their school environment.



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NATIONAL ART STANDARDS

- CREATING: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- PRESENTING: Interpreting and sharing artistic work.
- RESPONDING: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- CONNECTING: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.



Students fold their square paper two times to quarter it. The side with one fold should be on the left and the side with two folds on the bottom. Students then take their quarter circle stencil, trace the curve onto the folded paper, and cut on the curve.

The kids draw a design on their circles, trying to create something that shows symmetry. What they create and repeat is up to them, which adds variety to the overall project.

Students then took a quarter-circle stencil and traced the curve onto their folded paper. One cut on the curve later and they had a whole circle—or two halves, or four quarters, depending on whether they got the fold locations correct. Even if they end up with two or four pieces, it was okay because they would end up cutting the circles apart later anyway.

The kids had about 10 minutes to draw a design on their circles, trying to create something that showed symmetry. What they created

and repeated was up to them—simple shapes, animals cartoon characters—whatever they chose would add to the variety of the overall project. Then they cut their circles into quarters, reassembled them on their white paper squares and glued them down.

The final individual step was for students to apply glue to the backs of

their white paper squares, decide the direction they wanted it to go, and glue it onto an *even larger* white sheet. The size of the final collaborative depended on how many kids were involved and how big the original circle shapes were.

This particular project was done with all of our fourth- and fifth-



The collaboratives were assembled into a backdrop for our auditorium's stage.

MATERIALS

- 6" x 6" squares of white and colored paper
- Large sheets of paper on which to mount smaller squares
- Scissors
- Gluesticks
- Crayons, color sticks, markers, etc.



Students put glue on the backs of their white squares, decide the direction they want them to go, and glue them onto a larger sheet of white paper.

graders, and a couple of third-grade classes. In all, it involved about 450 kids. (This project can easily be modified for a wide range of grades and skill levels.)

Projects like this are visually striking because of how they look from a distance—and the detail of the designs when seen up close. Everyone involved feels they contributed to something that looks cool and enhances their school.

Kids of all skill levels are included in works like these, and it boosts their self-esteem to see their work hanging behind the school principal at assemblies. Emotionally and visually, these collaboratives are a win-win. ■

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The final collaborative can end up any size, depending on how many kids are involved and how big the original circle shapes are.

