

Henri Matisse has always been an artist whose work fascinates my elementary students. They are enthralled by his bright use of color and his intricate shapes and patterns. It was no surprise the latest Matisse-inspired project I taught was a smashing success with my third graders.

WE BEGAN BY LEARNING ABOUT MATISSE and how his work evolved throughout his career. We then honed in on his later works; namely, his paper cutout collages.

Students learned how he enjoyed “drawing with scissors” to create his organic and geometric shapes, and then learned how he arranged them into compelling compositions. Matisse’s collage, *The Beasts of the Sea* (1950), was an excellent point of departure to get my students’ creative juices flowing. Together we analyzed this work and discussed how and why Matisse created it.

We also went over geometric and organic shapes, and students identified how these shapes were used in Matisse’s work. This lesson could be taught at any time during the school year, but I taught it towards the beginning of the year so my third graders could brush up on their cutting and gluing skills, and to encourage them to break outside of their box and think a little more abstractly.

STUDENTS WERE THEN GIVEN THE CHALLENGE of creating their own Matisse-inspired cutout collages. First, learners were given a long rectangular piece of white mixed-media paper for the background of their compositions. Then they began cutting simple geometric shapes, such as squares and rectangles, out of colorful construction paper to fill their backgrounds with color.



TyShonna (left) and Eli. Some students decided to do more representational shapes than others. I left it up to them to decide whether they want to use more abstract or representational imagery in their composition.

Next, they cut out more intricate and original shapes to layer on top. Students did not use pencils to draw out any of their shapes beforehand. I found they were able to come up with more interesting shapes when they drew with scissors rather than pencils. I also gave no guidelines as to what kinds of shapes had to be created for their top layer. Some students began cutting out letters and representational shapes like flowers or lightning bolts, while others

kept their designs more nonobjective.

I provided a variety of construction paper of different colors and shapes for students to choose from, most of which was repurposed from the recycle bin. Students loved searching for interesting pieces of scrap paper to inspire their next shape design.

The only stipulation I gave them was that each piece they applied to their collage had to be modified in some way and not left the way they found it in the scrap pile. This encouraged students to *really* look at the paper and consider its possibilities, rather than just hastily gluing down a random piece they found.

ANOTHER TIP FOR ENCOURAGING careful consideration of shape placement and composition is to have students wait to glue down their pieces after they have cut all of them out. This allows the learner time to arrange and rearrange the shapes and to narrow

Drawing with Scissors

by Lauren Sapoch

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Elementary students will ...

- learn about the artist Henri Matisse and apply concepts from his work to create an original collage composition.
- recognize characteristics of abstract artwork and create an abstract style paper collage.
- recognize how the title of an artwork can play a role in how the work is perceived by the viewer.
- participate in an art critique and reflect on their artistic process and final product.

MATERIALS

- Scissors, glue
- Assortment of color construction paper cut into various sizes squares and rectangles
- Construction paper scrap pieces of all shapes, sizes and colors
- Black markers

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.

VOCABULARY

- Organic Shapes
- Geometric Shapes
- Collage
- Henri Matisse
- Abstract art
- Critique



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Abby

down what pieces they need to use and which ones should be eliminated.

Once students finished their compositions, they signed their work at the bottom and gave them titles. Again we drew inspiration from Matisse's collage *Beast of the Sea*, and discussed why he may have given his work that title.

Students had fun composing titles for their work. (Add an extra rectangular piece to the bottom for writing the title if additional space is needed.) After everything was complete they shared their work with the class and explained why they chose their titles.

I HAVE FOUND THIS PROJECT to have great breadth and depth due to its ability to engage student interest and utilize creative-thinking skills. I was blown away by how creative and different each piece was and how something so simple—cutting and gluing paper—could be so exciting to my students.

This is a great lesson to explore concepts like composition, color theory, and abstract vs. representational art. This project enabled my students to see scissors, paper and shapes in a new and exciting way! ■

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Caleb (left) and Kylie. A few students discovered how to do 3-D shapes on their collages like the one on the left. This student decided to create spirals that extended out from the page.