

# Lively Jack--Lantern Still Life

by Christy Sanzaro



Audrey, grade 5.

**A**utumn in central New York is one of the most distinctive times of year. Trees are ablaze with a warm spectrum of crimson and ochre; smoke from the burning branches of nearby farms tinges the air. For many elementary children, fall would not be complete without a visit to the local pumpkin patch.

Pumpkin carving is a favorite classroom activity. Around late October, the halls are filled with the sour smell of raw pumpkin innards, as parents, teachers and students are up to their elbows in yellowish strings and slime. These round, orange squash are transformed into jack-o'-lanterns that are placed around the school. We all enjoy their expressive faces, which make for good conversation. The day after Halloween, though, they are tossed in the trash.

This year, however, it occurred to me that jack-o'-lanterns would make fabulous subjects for drawing—great shape, contours, color. Plus, the fact they are hollow makes them less cumbersome to maneuver than their former natural state. So, I decided to rescue them from their eventual doom and incorporate them into a fall still life arrangement.

**SETTING THE SCENE** I began by spreading brightly colored swatches of fabric over some empty boxes to provide varied levels. I placed jack-o'-lanterns as focal pieces and encircled them with other fall flavors—cornucopias, fruits,

## NATIONAL STANDARDS

Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories.



One of the still-life setups.



Setup with spotlight on it.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### Elementary students will ...

- gain experience with observational drawing.
- grapple with how to choose original compositions.
- apply knowledge of the elements and principles of design, primarily shape, line and color.
- practice manipulating oil pastel.

## MATERIALS

- 18" x 24" large drawing paper in cool shades (blues and grays)
- Oil pastels (larger quantities of black, brown, white and light blue)
- Pencils and erasers
- Viewfinders (empty slide sleeves)
- Carved pumpkins and other fall objects
- Prints of Paul Cézanne's still-life paintings



Samuel, grade 3.



Haley, grade 5.



Shaylynn, kindergarten.



Daniel, grade 2.

leaves, vegetables and vases of sunflowers. Spotlights were used for a professional art-studio touch.

To allow the children equal viewing access, I had to rethink the space, rearranging some tables and seating. I decided to try this lesson with all grade levels, so I could keep the same setup for all classes.

The following day, children were immediately curious about the new furniture arrangement and subject matter, recognizing these grimacing orange orbs from the days prior in their classrooms.

I began the lesson by showing them a few posters of Paul Cézanne's still life. We talked briefly about his process of setting up the subject matter, choosing an interesting composition and using dark contour lines around his shapes. Upper-elementary students practiced looking through viewfinders (empty slides) to find smart compositions.

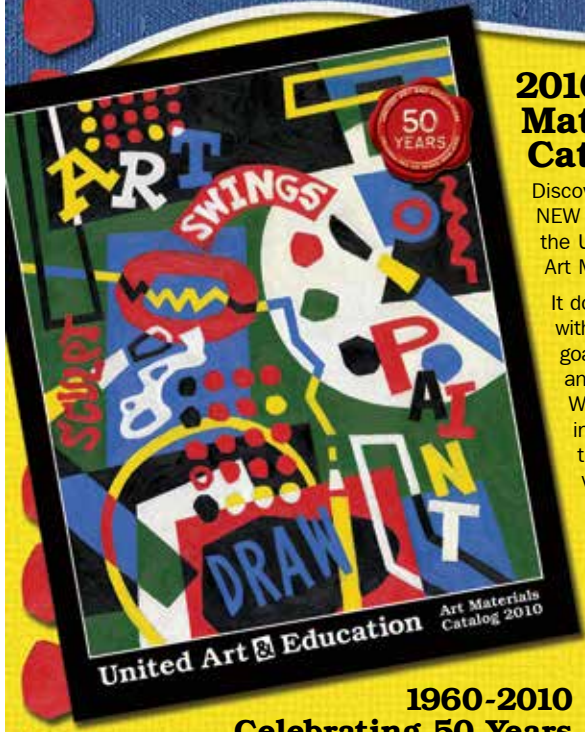
In order to give the students an idea of how to begin drawing, I modeled a horizontal composition on the dry-erase board, beginning with the large,

round contours of the jack-o'-lantern near the middle of my paper. Other shapes filled out my composition. As a rule of thumb, I encouraged students to first work on big, broad shapes, saving the specifics for last.

Next, I gave the children large gray paper (18" x 24") with brown and black oil pastels for outlines. I explained how observational drawing involves concentration, and discouraged talking. A few children were hesitant to begin with oil pastel so

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## LIVELY

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they used pencil to make outlines, and traced over them later with oil pastel.

Once they completed brown outlines, students could begin filling in their shapes with color, using the side and tip of their oil pastels. I limited their background color choices—white or light blue oil pastel, in this case—to help achieve a feeling of unity in their art.

**CAPTURING THE FALL MOOD** The aftermath of the jack-o'-lantern experience far exceeded my expectations! Some students really pushed the oil pastel medium, learning to layer different colors and blend with their fingers. Many began to model light and shadow in

*... students really pushed the oil pastel medium, learning to layer different colors and blend with their fingers.*

their drawings. For several days, I had students volunteering to finish their artwork during free time. They were actually racing against time to finish composing their drawings before nature decomposed the pumpkins completely!

The resulting drawings showed different points of view and captured the mood of late fall. Examples from all grade levels were displayed in the hallway, and passersby marveled at the drawing abilities of the different age groups. All of my kindergarten through fifth-grade classes took the task seriously and found the subject matter engaging.

I am already anticipating next year's carved personalities for a still-life exercise that will likely be a staple project for years to come. What fun! ■

*Christy Sanzaro is an art teacher at Minoa (N.Y.) Elementary.*

### VOCABULARY

Composition	Still life
Contour line	Unity
Mood	Viewpoint
Outline	

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