

Graphite Embossing

Viewing Positive and Negative Space in Multiple Dimensions

This drawing lesson challenges students to look at positive and negative space in both the value and dimension of a drawing.

Selecting a visual reference from a sketch or photo, the student creates two drawings on a matte metal sheet. Using a variety of pencil grades, from softest 6B to hardest 6H, the positive drawing creates lights and darks as well as low-relief embossing just as the eye would see it. The negative drawing is created in reverse — values, composition and embossing are completely the opposite of the first drawing. By reversing the roles of space and object, students will learn the role of each within a drawing.

Graphite drawings on ArtEmboss matte metal sheets glow like silver. The effect of the metallic sheen and the texture created by embossing is very dynamic.

Grade Levels 5-12

Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cut ArtEmboss matte metal sheets in quarters (4-3/4" x 6" pieces) using scissors or a paper cutter. Each student will need two pieces.
2. Gather reference photos or have students prepare preliminary sketches. Look for strong contrast and line definition for best results.
3. Students will need to practice using the different grades of graphite pencils to understand the variety of lines and tones they are capable of producing. Practice creating values on black construction paper.



Materials

Amaco® ArtEmboss Soft Metal, pkg of 12 sheets, Medium weight 9-1/4" x 12" (60518-2060); need 1/4 to 1/2 sheet per student

Blick® Studio Drawing Pencils, assorted grades (22220-); share 6 pencils between 4 students

Design® Kneaded Rubber Eraser, small (21502-2620); share 3-4 across classroom

Blick® Economy Construction Paper, pkg of 50 sheets, 9" x 12" black, (11420-2023); need one sheet per student

Crescent® Matboard, assorted colors (13007-); need a piece approx. 9" x 15" per student

Elmer's® Tacky Glue, 4-oz (23883-1004); share 4 bottles across class

Process

1. All drawing must take place on a surface with some "give". Working directly on the desktop will not allow the metal to be stretched and embossed properly. Use a stack of newspapers, magazines or felt.
2. Use a ruler to measure 1/4" from the edges of each piece of metal and draw a straight line with a medium pencil to make a border. Set one of the pieces of metal aside, turn the other over and start drawing the positive image. ArtEmboss is a lightweight metal that has been permanently coated on both sides with a matte black finish. It's a perfectly textured surface for pencil drawings and embosses very easily.

Hints for successful drawings:

- Use the softest graphite pencils for large areas of light and the hardest ones for details.
 - Incorporate a wide range of values and textures.
 - Work from both sides of the metal sheet, making textures and embossed lines from the back side.
 - ArtEmboss can be stretched to the point of tearing if overworked. It's best to work small areas at a time. If the metal does tear, a piece of black construction paper can be taped or glued behind the tear to mask it.
 - If erasing is required, use a small piece of a kneaded eraser and lift graphite gently away from the surface of the metal.
3. Once the positive drawing is complete, begin work on the negative one. Since students are not accustomed to looking at negative images, it may be helpful to look at film negatives or digitally altered photos first. Once again, practice on construction paper scraps is recommended before drawing on the metal.
 4. Apply a line of glue around edges of the back side of the metal pieces and mount both drawings side by side on a piece of matboard or colored cardboard.

Options

- For greater economy, use smaller pieces of ArtEmboss or give each student a 1/4 sheet (4-3/4" x 6") and have them draw a line down the middle, creating a positive/negative drawing in one piece.

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National Standards

Content Standard #1 Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

9-12 Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

Content Standard #2 Using knowledge of structures and functions

5-8 Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas

9-12 Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems