

Van Gogh Clay Plaque

(art + history; art + literature)

A look at oil paintings by Vincent Van Gogh will direct students to the qualities that define impressionism: bright, airy color choices, descriptive forms and textures that create movement and flow within a piece. This lesson plan begins by focusing on line and texture as students sculpt a flat slab of clay, defining an impressionistic landscape. Once the clay has dried, students will paint the piece using a palette of colors inspired by Van Gogh. The texture that has been carved into the clay will serve as a guide for applying brushstrokes, making it easier for students to understand the expressiveness of unblended colors.

Grade Levels 5-8

Objectives

- Students will learn biographical information about the artist Vincent Van Gogh and study his contributions to art and to history.
- Students will learn the importance and features of impressionist paintings. They will use and understand the application of color, line, texture, form, movement and expression in a work of art.
- Students will interpret and discuss the emotions conveyed by Van Gogh in his paintings and compare his choices of subject matter with those of other artists and with their own decisions.
- Students will sculpt a 3-dimensional piece from a flat slab, using basic carving techniques.
- Students will observe the use of color in impressionist paintings and apply similar choices within their own artwork.
- Students will observe and mimic the short, unblended brushstrokes used by Van Gogh and understand their expressive quality.

Historical/Cultural Relativity

Vincent Van Gogh was a Dutch painter who lived during the latter part of the 19th Century. While short, his life spanned the European shift into the modern world through the industrial revolution, and his prolific artistic output chronicles his reactions to the people and places of his time. His unique vision of the world expressed in his drawings and paintings provide a window both into the world of the 19th century and into the mind of the artist.

Preparation

1. Visuals and biographical information should be presented prior to beginning the project. The video "Van Gogh's Van Gogh" (70010-1001) is an excellent introduction to this lesson. Compare and contrast Van Gogh's style with other impressionists and with realistic landscapes and still lifes.
2. Connect with literary disciplines by having students write an interpretation using words to describe a Van Gogh painting such as "The Starry Night" or "Wheat Field with Cypress Trees". This will help students observe color and texture within a piece.

Process

1. Each student will need a ball of clay about the size of a baseball. Divide the clay prior to class time and store in large zip-lock plastic bags until ready to use. No special cover is needed for tables, however, a piece of paper under the slab will make it easier to pick up.
2. Have students flatten clay with their hands, then use rolling pin to form a slab. Thickness should be no less than 1/4" — thinner slabs will be fragile.
3. Students should begin by drawing a landscape design lightly onto the surface with a toothpick. Errors may be corrected by smoothing them out with a finger at this point. Once a design is ready, students create their lines and textures by carefully carving into the clay with a linoleum cutting tool. Pieces of clay that remain in the cutter may be tapped out onto the tabletop or removed with a toothpick — students should not put their fingers on the cutting blade. Use the Large U cutter to bore 2 hanging holes into the top center of the design at least 1/2" from the edge.
4. Allow the clay to dry for 48 hours. Do not attempt to shorten dry time. Once the front side of the plaque is dry, turn it over so that air can reach the back of the piece. Clay will dry hard and white.
5. Lightly sand burrs away from texture lines. Students will select colors that they observe in Van Gogh's paintings and paint the plaque using a small, round brush that will reach into the crevices. Each stroke should be laid down and left in place, not blended.
6. To hang the finished plaque, strongly knot a coordinating ribbon, cord or wire through the holes. Using 2 hanging holes will make the plaque hang evenly and provide less stress in one area of the clay. NOTE: Plaques may also be displayed on a plate rack or holder, so that hanging holes are not needed in the design.



Materials

Crayola Air Dry Clay, 25 lb Value Pack (33272-1025)
One class pack will make approximately 40 plaques, size 4" x 6" or smaller.

Speedball Linoleum Cutter handle (40203-0000), one per student

Speedball Linoleum Cutters, share between students:
Large U (40203-1012)
Small V (40203-1312)
Large V (40203-1412)
Small V (40203-1212)
Knife (40203-1112)

Wooden Rolling Pins (30345-1006)

Blick Artist's Acrylic Colors (00624-)

Blick Scholastic Golden Taklon Brushes, size 4 Round (05858-1004)

Blick Disposable Palette, 9" x 12" (03063-1023)

Toothpicks

Fine Grit Sandpaper (34916-1303)

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 experience and ideas

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas

5-8
Students use subjects, themes and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artwork.

Content Standard #5 — Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

5-8
Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry

Content Standard #6 — Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

5-8
Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts.