

MoNA

Museum of Northwest Art

Color Wheel & Book Mark Inspired by Max Benjamin

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
CREATED FOR YOUNG ARTISTS

Age: First Grade

Lesson Duration: One Hour

Subject: Color theory



Student Bookmark Example (Front & Back)

Image Credit: Museum of Northwest Art

Description

In this lesson students will create a color wheel. Beginning with only primary colors (red, yellow, and blue), students will gain an understanding of mixing colors, color theory, and gray tones to create a complete color wheel. Students will apply their color-mixing skills to create a personal bookmark. To help students get inspired, they will learn about Pacific Northwest artist Max Benjamin. They will also view the work of British Northwest artist Frank Bowling for further exploration.

Materials

- Tempera paint
- Brushes
- Paper
- Pencils
- Rulers
- A circle template
- Bowls of water
- Paper towels

Inspiration

Before creating color wheels, students will learn about two artists, Max Benjamin and Frank Bowling, who emphasize color as the dominant art element in their paintings. As a result of student observation and discussion of these paintings, interest in hands-on learning to mix their own colors will be established. To help facilitate an inquiry-based discussion, full-size images of the artworks and a VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) appendix is included at the end of this lesson.

Vocabulary

- ✓ 2-Dimensional
- ✓ Primary colors
- ✓ Secondary colors
- ✓ Tertiary colors
- ✓ Analogous colors
- ✓ Complimentary colors
- ✓ Neutrals
- ✓ Earth tones
- ✓ Shade
- ✓ Tint
- ✓ Value
- ✓ Value change
- ✓ Warm/cool colors



Student Color Wheel Example
Image credit: Museum of Northwest Art



Max Benjamin
Image credit: Cascadia Weekly

As you look at Max Benjamin's artworks, what do you notice about the way the artist uses color? Can you see where he has mixed two colors on the canvas to create a new hue? Do certain colors make his artworks feel happy? Or sad? How many colors can you name in one painting?

About the Artist: Max Benjamin

Max Benjamin is a Pacific Northwest artist living in a log cabin on Guemes Island, Washington. At 92, Benjamin still lives and paints in his art studio, located on a rhododendron farm on the island. Benjamin uses bold colors, lines and large-scale canvases to create his abstract art.

Benjamin is sometimes associated with the Skagit Mystics- such as Morris Graves and Mark Tobey- but he is lovingly referred to as "a grumpy eccentric who has always gone his own way" (PCC). For example, the artist only numbers his paintings (and never signs them) to allow viewers to find their own meaning within the artwork. To learn more about the artist, his process and images click [here](#) and [here](#).



Untitled by Max Benjamin
Image credit: ArtsWA



Untitled by Max Benjamin
Image credit: ArtsWA

FURTHER EXPLORATION!

About the Artist: Frank Bowling



Frank Bowling, 2019. Photo by Mathilde Agius.
Image source: news.artnet.com

Frank Bowling is a Black British contemporary artist known for his creative uses of paints, bold colors and abstractions. Though his paintings may seem similar to color field paintings of Max Benjamin or Mark Rothko, Bowling includes specific references to his family, his history, racism, politics and art history within his works. To learn more about the artist, read [this article](#). To see further artwork by Bowling, head to [this website](#).



Marcia H Travels by Frank Bowling
Image credit: Alexander Grey Associates

Instructions

- 1) Students will draw a circle on white paper (using the circle template), then will divide the circles into six equal triangular portions.
- 2) Using only the primary colors, they will paint three of the triangles using red, yellow, and blue.
 - Make sure to alternate triangles so that one primary color is not next to another.
- 3) In order to create secondary colors, they will mix two appropriate primary colors to achieve the secondary (Ex. red & yellow make orange).
- 4) Students will mix opposite colors on the color wheel together to achieve complimentary browns. A shade will be created by mixing black to a color, and tint is achieved by adding white. This helps to describe and demonstrate a change in value.
- 5) Students are ready to use their color-mixing skills to create a personal bookmark. On one side, have students draw overlapping curved lines, and straight overlapping lines on the other (see student example image). Primary colors and white (tints) will be used on the side with curved lines, while black (shades) will be added to the primary colors with straight lines.



Reflection & Closer

When students have finished the art-making activity, lead a discussion to reflect on the process and what they have learned. It may be helpful to review vocabulary and reiterate the varied color terms. As part of reflection, you have an option to lead students on a gallery walk. This allows students time to observe classmates' work, and compare and contrast peers' color wheels and bookmarks. This can be a helpful demonstration to emphasize that no two bookmarks or wheels are exactly like, as is often the case in art!

Learning and State Standards

Fulfills [Washington State Arts Learning Standards](#):

- **VA:Cr1.2.4** (Use observation and investigation in preparation for making a work of art)
- **VA:Cr3.1.1** (Use art vocabulary to describe choices while creating art)



Visual Thinking Strategies

MoNA's Education programs utilize Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which is a research-based teaching method that promotes aesthetic development including critical thinking and communication skills. Here in the MoNA, we use VTS to engage students and general visitors with art encouraging them to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully; however, VTS can be effectively used across curricula. This approach teaches its participants how to take the time to observe closely, describe what they see in detail and provide evidence for their observations. Students learn that their reflections and thoughts are valued and appreciated in this inclusive teaching method.

In order to facilitate a VTS discussion, you first encourage viewers to take a quiet moment to observe the work you are going to explore. Then you ask the following questions and paraphrase the responses without adding any of your own judgements. You can insert additional vocabulary and point to specific parts of the artwork.

What's going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that...?
What more can you find?

Visual Thinking Strategy Links

If you are interested in learning more about VTS, [here is their website](#). If you already know and love VTS, but want help finding great images to VTS in your classroom, here is a [fantastic gallery](#). You can also visit this website for additional resources: <https://www.monamuseum.org/resources-for-educators>



Untitled by Max Benjamin
Image credit: ArtsWA



Untitled by Max Benjamin
Image credit: ArtsWA



Marcia H Travels by Frank Bowling
Image credit: Alexander Grey Associates



Hothead by Frank Bowling
Image credit: Alexander Grey Associates