

Still Life Practice Inspired by George Tsutakawa

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
DESIGNED BY DEANN
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Description

Students will study the work of George Tsutakawa in order to explore the feeling of depth in composition, before creating their own still life drawings.

Materials

- Paper
- Pencils
- Objects that one would take on a picnic for a still life (such as food, blanket, plates, silverware, etc)



Student example

Image Source: MoNA Intern

Relevant Vocabulary

- Depth
- Overlapping
- Perspective
- Shape
- Design element
- Space

Instructions

First Session:

1) Share the image of George Tsutakawa's "Untitled Lanterns" to the class. Use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to lead a discussion about his work. More information and resources on VTS and a full size image of the artwork are included at the end of this lesson.

2) Drawing exercise:

- a. Arrange items so they do not touch one another and are not placed behind one another.
- b. Have the students do contour drawing of the items using pencils on paper. A contour drawing is when the artist drawing the contours, or outline of a subject.

Second Session:

3) Drawing exercise:

- a. Arrange the items so some appear to be "overlapped" objects, for example: one in front of the other or touching.
- b. Draw the shapes and details of each object.
- c. Look at the drawings from both sessions and discuss unity and space. Compare the feelings you have when looking at the pairs of works. Do the objects tell a story together or do they stand alone?



Session one student example
Image Source: MoNA Intern



George Tsutakawa preparing a design for a fountain
Photo Credit: Dave Potts

Integration Ideas

1) Health & Science: Nutrition

Students can plan a nutritional picnic. Bring some of those objects for the still life.

2) Math: Fractions

Have students find a recipe and convert the ingredients to make the recipe for the amount of people going on a picnic. Have them calculate the nutritional facts for the recipe.

3) Social Studies: Japan & Internment History

Note that George Tsutakawa was an artist who was born in Seattle, sent to Japan at age 7 to live with his grandparents, returned to Seattle when he was 16 and graduated from the UW. Meanwhile his family property and business were confiscated and many of his family members were sent to internment camps.

See this link for more information:

<https://www.historyforkids.net/japanese-internment-camps.html>

Learning and State Standards

Fulfills **Washington State Arts Learning Standards:**

- **VA:Cr1.1.5** (Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design)
- **VA:Re9.1.6** (Develop and apply relevant criteria to evaluate a work of art)

George Tsutakawa



George Tsutakawa was born in Seattle to Japanese parents. As a child, the family moved to Japan, but George was sent back to Seattle at age 16. He worked at produce businesses owned by relatives, and graduated from the University of Washington in 1937. By 1947, he had volunteered for the Army, travelled across America visiting museums, and got married to his partner, Ayame. He then got his MFA at UW, and became a professor there for 37 years. He is most known for his fountains and large sculptures, made of bronze, steel, and aluminum. His earlier work in painting and drawing show more influence from modernist and abstract 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...?

Visual Thinking Strategy Links

What more can you find?

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 use in your classroom, here is a [fantastic gallery](#). You can also visit this website for additional resources: www.monamuseum.org/resources-for-educators



Untitled Lanterns 1956

Image Source: <https://georgetsutakawa.com/watercolors/>



Fountain of Wisdom

Image Source: <https://georgetsutakawa.com/fountain-sculptures/>



Five Squash

Image Source: <https://georgetsutakawa.com/sumi/>