

Tree Mural Inspired by Adrienne Smits

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
DESIGNED BY MONA EDUCATORS



Image credit: MoNA Educator
example

Description

Students will first be introduced to artist and ecologist Adrienne Smits, and practice Visual Thinking Strategies with images of her large-scale artworks.

Students will then work together to create their own large mural of a tree. Drawing inspiration from Smits, the mural will include trees, plants, other flora, and rocks. The students will use the art elements **scale**, **proportion**, **balance**, **abstract**, and **composition**.

Vocabulary

- ✓ Mural
- ✓ Large scale
- ✓ Small scale
- ✓ Thick
- ✓ Thin
- ✓ Balance
- ✓ Composition
- ✓ Proportion
- ✓ Abstract



Materials

- Large white paper or cardboard
- Real tree branch (for reference)
- Acrylic, watercolor, and tempera paint
- Pencils & erasers
- Thin and thick paint brushes
- Artist images (included)

Instructions

In Large Group

1) Introduce artist Adrienne Smits

- Allow enough time for students to look at Smits' artwork. Using Visual Thinking Strategies, guide students to note their observations about the artwork.
- Additional artwork images can be found on [Smits' website](#).
- An overview of VTS and additional resources can be found [here](#).

2) Introduce the art-making activity.

3) Demonstrate how to draw a tree by looking at the tree branch that was brought in for reference.

4) Show them how to use the acrylic paint versus watercolor paints, and how to properly mix the colors in the paint trays.

5) After deciding on a plan for the mural as a class, divide students into small groups. Students will take turns working on the mural in their small groups.

In Small Groups

1) Remind the group of the class mural plan, and that some students will have to wait their turn while their classmates draw and paint their ideas.

2) Before picking up paints have students sketch what they plan to add to the mural.

3) Ask students to pick the colors that they will use for their section of the mural.

4) Two to three students can work together and begin painting (depending on group and mural size).

- Have the first 2-3 students draw their idea, then move to painting. The next group of students draws their ideas while the first is painting. Stagger tasks and repeat the process until each student has had a turn painting and the project is finished.

Adrienne Smits: Artist and Ecologist

Adrienne Smits loves the outdoors. Not only does she paint and draw scenes from nature, she researches and works in nature, too! Smits is an **aquatic ecologist**. This means she studies bodies of water and how all the living things in and around water live together. Learn more about her research [here](#).



<http://adriannesmits.com/>

Smits spends a lot of time out in the woods and mountains of her home in central California and the Pacific Northwest. This is where she gathers ideas for her paintings! Learn more about Smits' artwork [here](#).



Untitled by Adrienne Smits
Image credit: <http://www.artstudies.com>



Church Mountain by Adrienne Smits
Image credit: <http://www.artstudies.com>

Today you will be working with classmates to create a **mural** of a tree! Look closely at Adrienne's paintings. What colors do you see? What types of branches are there? Do you see rocks? Or flowers? What might you want to include in your own painting?

Reflection Activity & Closing

- **Show & Share.** Have each small group take time to talk about their additions to the mural. If the group had any issues, take time to discuss how they resolved it.
- Have the students use VTS to explore their own mural, using what they learned during VTS with Smits' artwork.
- Display the mural for the class and other classes to enjoy!



MoNA Educator example

Learning and State Standards

Fulfills **Washington State Arts Learning Standards:**

- **VA:Cr1.2.K** (Engage collaboratively in creative art-making in response to an artistic problem)
- **VA:Cr2.1.K** (Through experimentation, build skills in various media and approaches to art-making)
- **VA:Cr2.2.K** (Identify safe and non-toxic art materials, tools, and equipment)
- **VA:Cr2.3.K** (Create art that represents natural and constructed environments)

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...?

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



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