Fractured Chairs: Exploring Distortion

Presenters:
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Grade Levels:
High School

Overview of the Lesson: The lesson introduces and explores the concepts of distortion and abstraction as a form of expression.

Big Idea: Artists shape their artistic investigations, following or breaking established conventions, in pursuit of images that represent their unique view of the world.

California Content Standards:

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION
1.1 (GR 9-12) Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.
1.1 (GR 9-12 adv) Analyze and discuss complex ideas, such as distortion, color theory, arbitrary color, scale, expressive content, and real versus virtual in works of art.
1.3 Describe the principles of design as used in works of art, focusing on dominance and subordination.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION
2.1 (GR 9-12) Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.
2.2 (GR 9-12 adv) Plan and create works of art that reflect complex ideas, such as distortion, color theory, arbitrary color, scale, expressive content, and real versus virtual.
2.4 (GR 9-12 adv) Demonstrate in their own works of art a personal style and an advanced proficiency in communicating an idea, theme, or emotion.

3.0 HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT
3.1 (GR 9-12) 3.2 Compare and contrast works of art from various periods, styles, and cultures and identify similarities and differences.
3.2 (GR 9-12) Identify and describe the role and influence of new technologies on contemporary works of art.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING
4.2 (GR 9-12 adv) Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.
4.3 (GR 9-12) Formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the views of others.
4.5 (GR 9-12) Employ the conventions of art criticism in writing and speaking about works of art.
4.5 (GR 9-12 adv) Construct a rationale for the validity of a specific work of art – artwork that falls outside their own conceptions of art.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS
5.2 (GR 9-12 adv) Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.
California Common Core Content Standards (for ELA and Technical Subjects):

RST (Gr 11-12) 3. Follow precisely a complex multistep procedure when carrying out experiments or performing technical tasks (or art assignments).

WHST (Gr 11-12) 1. Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
   10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Goals. To demonstrate:
   o understanding of the characteristics of distortion as a technique that involves exaggeration and a twisting of the image for a specific purpose.
   o knowledge of David Hockney and his unique ideas about time, viewpoint, and multiple images.
   o understanding of objects as symbols for self (chair paintings by Van Gogh and Gauguin) and comparison with the chair artworks created by David Hockney.

Learning Objectives The learner will
1) Identify and describe the characteristics of abstraction and distortion. (Artistic
2) Demonstrate increased knowledge of technical skills in observational drawing.
3) Create an artwork that shows distortion and that gives a feeling of movement.
4) Discuss the purposes of art in the works of selected artists who abstracted and/or distorted their images.
5) Explain the intent of a personal work of art and draw possible parallels between it and the work of a recognized artist.
6) Establish criteria to use in selecting works of art for a specific type of art exhibition.

Materials: scratch paper pencils and erasers large drawing paper (for each student):
   1 piece 15” x 20” and
   1 piece 18” x 24” marking pens/markers  black & colored, colored pencils and/or oil pastels scissors glue or library paste newspapers

Motivational Materials: Art prints, books, e-images showing artists' interpretation of chairs (Van Gogh, Gauguin, Hockney). If possible, as a culminating activity, show the video Behind the Scenes showing David Hockney's "walk around a chair" in the Film Behind the Scenes.
Vocabulary: distort (distortion), abstract (abstraction), arbitrary colors, viewpoint, rhythm, repetition, movement, unity.

Review: proportion, overlap, placement, contours, negative space, observational drawing, craftsmanship.

Procedure:

Suggested Teaching Strategies: Don’t let students know in the beginning of the lesson that they are going to be cutting up their drawings! For this reason, student examples are to be kept “secret” until the initial observational drawings are complete.

(Introduction) Later we’re going to do something you’ve never done before, but first we’re going to do some observational drawing. Carefully look at the chair or stool that has been placed near or on your table.

Carefully draw the contours of the chair on large (15” x 20”) paper; the drawing should be so large that it touches or nearly touches the top, bottom, and maybe even the sides of your paper.

When you are satisfied with your drawing, erase any lines that you don’t need. Draw in details that you see.

Color in the lines and shapes of your drawing. Select and use a palette of arbitrary colors of equal intensity.

Use as many colors as you like. Do not put any color in the background or negatives spaces of your drawing.

(This next step comes as a surprise for the students):

At the beginning of the second part of the lesson: Before continuing, discuss the drawings, pointing out the realistic elements (proportion, appearance of depth). Then give directions for the next portion of the lesson:
Cut your drawing into at least six irregular pieces and place them on the larger (18" x 24") drawing paper. Put the drawing back together again like a jigsaw puzzle.

Pull the pieces apart, arranging them with spaces in between.

You can twist some or all of the pieces. Plan how you will reconnect the pieces in the gaps you’ve left behind. Paste the pieces in place. Use a marker to reconnect the twisted parts.

Paste the pieces in place. Use a marker to reconnect the cut and twisted parts.

Fill in the connecting parts so that they are the same color as the two parts or "ends" that they connect.
At the beginning of the next session:

Once all the parts are connected, Plan your background (the negative spaces). You are to create a colorful and energetic background -- one that complements your drawing and doesn’t overwhelm it by being too bold or too busy.

Remember: the colors and/or patterns of the negative spaces should help to unify the parts of the artwork. You want to create unity or harmony when designing your negative spaces.
Discussion and Reflection:

Display the artworks on a bulletin board and ask students to consider how distortion makes objects more interesting than their original careful and realistic drawings of a chair. *Be sure students explain their answers and give reasons for their opinions*.

How does the finished artwork show movement and energy? What visual elements cause this sense of movement?

What "rules" or conventions of drawing did students break in converting their drawings into an image that is innovative and unique?

Ask students to identify what they like (and what they would change) about their distorted chair drawings.

*During the classroom discussion, call on students to point out which drawings:*
- use distortion effectively to create energy and impact;
- capture a sense of movement;
- use the negative space (background) to unify the drawing:
- show careful craftsmanship and skillful application of color.

After the class discussion, have students write their individual thoughts in a reflection. In addition to the discussion questions, urge students to consider:

- *Do you think that distorting the image made your artwork more exciting and expressive? In what ways?*

- *How does distortion affect the mood of an artwork? Does a distorted image have psychological impact that a realistic image does not? (Be sure to explain and give reasons for your opinions)*

- *What do you like best about your artwork?*

- *If you were going to do this activity over again, what would you do differently?*

Go to the website to see excerpts from three students' journal entries
http://www.leehanson.net/sample-lesson.html
Assessment:

Students need to know from the start what their artwork should include and how it's being scored. Usually the rubric is given out at the beginning of the lesson, but because of the "surprise" element, the Rubric for Fractured Chairs should be distributed when the initial drawings are "complete" and before the drawings are cut into pieces and rearranged.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Beginning Below Standard</th>
<th>2 Proficient At Standard</th>
<th>3 Advanced Above Standard</th>
<th>totals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstraction</strong></td>
<td>Few shapes are simplified and color choices are random.</td>
<td>The majority of the shapes are simplified; most of the selected colors are arbitrary.</td>
<td>Shapes are simplified; a palette of arbitrary colors has been selected and used throughout. All elements contribute to the visual impact of the distorted image.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Distortion, Movement and Unity</strong></td>
<td>Random placement of parts provides little distortion and inadequate unity. Movement is suggested but limited.</td>
<td>Parts of the drawing are purposefully placed and twisted with the overall distortion generally creating a sense of movement and unity.</td>
<td>The twisting of shapes and the planned reconnections contribute greatly to the unity and sense of movement. The background is an important unifying component.</td>
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<td><strong>Craftsmanship</strong></td>
<td>Little effort or attention to detail is evident. Color is smudged and unevenly applied. Edges are uneven and indistinct.</td>
<td>Parts are placed, and joined so that connections are generally invisible. Application of color is fairly even; some attention to detail is evident.</td>
<td>The quality of the work is evident; parts are cleanly cut, placed, and joined so that connections appear seamless. Contour edges are sharp and distinct; color throughout is carefully applied in both the positive &amp; negative spaces.</td>
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Teacher Notes on Criteria:

A. **Abstraction**: Shapes are simplified, a palette of arbitrary colors has been selected and used throughout. All elements contribute in a purposeful way to the visual impact of the abstracted image.

B. **Distortion, Movement, and Unity**: The twisting of shapes and planned reconnections contribute greatly to the unity and sense of movement. The background is an important unifying component.

C. **Craftsmanship**: The quality of the work is clearly evident; parts are cleanly cut, placed, and joined so that the connections appear seamless. The contour edges are sharp and distinct; color throughout has been carefully applied in both the positive and negative spaces.
Visuals

If the chairs by Van Gogh, Gauguin, and/or Hockney have been introduced, ask students to identify the ways the artists' work was distorted or abstracted.

- What "rules" or conventions did the artist break in his composition?
- What unique view of the chair did each artist present?
- How did he accomplish this?
- What was the artist's purpose in selecting and arranging the objects in his artwork? (Van Gogh and Gauguin used their chair paintings as personal symbols; Hockney wanted to give a sense of moving through space and seeing the chair from different viewpoints and at different times).
- What reason(s) do you think the artists worked in this way?
- Why did they select chairs as their subject matter?

This lesson was originally developed and used as part of The Educationally Interpretive Exhibition: Rethinking the Display of Student Art (an exhibition and publication by the National Art Education Association).

The project was a collaborative effort between Palo Alto Unified School District and Stanford University; Dr. Lee Hanson (Art Coordinator of PAUSD) and Dr. Elliot Eisner (Professor at Stanford University) directed the project, utilizing the skills and knowledge of graduate students enrolled in Stanford’s art education program interacting with the school district’s teaching artists.

The purpose of the exhibition and the publication were to encourage the understanding of the relationships between thinking and the creation of art.