Sand Mandala Lesson Plan

LESSON TITLE: Geometry and Creation of Sand Mandalas

Name of Presenter: Wendy Northup

Grade Level: HS

Background Information:

This lesson was created when I was thinking of a project that would celebrate the 2012 Dalai Lama visit to Danbury, Ct where I was teaching at the time. The local Tibetan monks were making a large sand mandala in honor of the visit by his Holiness, and I wanted the students to have a similar experience. Sand mandalas made by Tibetan monks are intricate and filled with the symbols and colors of Buddhism. They are also ephemeral and destroyed in a ritual where the sand is gathered and released into a body of water. I wanted my student’s mandalas to be permanent which is how we came to use the adhesive-backed foam core.

I first gave the project as a group project, where students worked in groups of three to create a mandala with a 36” diameter, but in the past two years I have had students work individually on a 16” diameter mandala.

Content Standards:

1.4 Analyze and describe how the composition of a work of art is affected by the use of a particular principle of design.
2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.
3.4 Discuss the purpose of art in selected contemporary cultures.

Learning Objectives/Essential Understandings:

To explore a new material, sand, and discover the variety of effects that can be achieved.
To create an original mandala by applying the elements of design and geometry to make a symmetrical design.

Vocabulary:
Mandala, Buddhism, ephemeral, color theory, symmetry, geometric shapes, enlightenment, warm colors, cool colors

Materials:
Paper, pencils, (both graphite and colored), foam core with an adhesive side, x-acto knife, red transfer paper, tracing paper, ruler, compass, variety of colored sand (12 – 18 different colors), circle templates, and templates of a variety of geometric shapes
Motivation:

I show a video of monks creating a mandala: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ga5s_qYgJS8. After viewing it, we discuss why the monks would destroy such a beautiful, intricate work. I have students research facts about Buddhism and the noble eightfold path to enlightenment. http://www.pbs.org/edens/thailand/buddhism.htm

Procedure:

Day 1: I spend an entire class discussing ephemeral works, showing a slide presentation that looks at the works of Andy Goldsworthy, Vik Muniz, Nele Azevedo's ice people, and sidewalk chalk artists. The end of the slide show has the video of Tibetan monks making and destroying a sand mandala. We discuss the reasons they would do this and what the mandala means. I then have students work in small groups to find different facts about Buddhism, and we write these on a large sheet of paper that is up during the entire project.

Day 2: Students watch a Youtube video on how to “grow a mandala.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g16B64myG-E
I then give them the rest of the period to create their own freeform mandala on a 12” square piece of paper. I encourage them to use as much of the paper as possible.

Day 3: I demonstrate how to dissect a circle with a ruler and a compass and talk about symmetry. At this point the students are working on tracing paper. Once they have dissected the circle into at least 8 parts they can begin to work on their finished design by incorporating the elements of the freeform mandala into the more precise one.

Day 4: When the student has completed the design, he/she is required to color it with colored pencil so the student can begin to envision how the addition of color will change the design. I require that at least one quarter of the design be fully colored. Often students will color another quarter in a different combination so there are choices before using the sand.

Day 5: The finished design is transferred on to the foam core by using red transfer paper. The design must be put on the side that has the adhesive under the paper. I demonstrate how the design is cut into stencil-like shapes that the sand is poured onto. I give the students a small 4 - 6” square of the foam core to practice the technique before starting on their project. The design must be worked from the inside to the outside in order to keep the sand colors “clean”.

It usually takes a few days for students to finish applying the sand for the finished the mandala. When they are all finished we have a class critique.
Assessment and/or Evaluation:

I always have a class evaluation of the mandalas where we discuss what works and what could have been done differently. We discuss the colors chosen - do areas come forward or recede the way the student envisioned? Is the design symmetrical? I always display the finished work in a public space on campus so the school community can enjoy the designs. I assess the finished work on originality of design, craftsmanship and use of color.

Photos of finished works:

Students applying the sand 2012
Student Sand Mandalas 2013

Student Sand Mandalas 2014