

Blue Man Lesson Lab

The Art of Blue

Action Painting

Elementary School

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

Paint flies in a Blue Man show. Color explodes on and around the stage, and sometimes even on audience members. Pipes sing a colorful song. Art springs forth from musical exploration. This is the art of Blue Man. There is something curious, irreverent, experiential, playful, and active about the art of Blue Man. The same can be said for the work of Jackson Pollack. In fact, Pollack called his paintings action paintings. He viewed art as, “energy and motion made visible – memories arrested in space.” This lesson will give learners the opportunity to create art in the spirit of Pollack, and the Blue Man.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by showing learners three Pollack paintings. It might be helpful to discuss the images in the context of general information regarding the importance of Pollack’s work, and position in the evolution of modern art. Ask learners to consider the following questions during this introductory exercise: How would you describe these paintings? What do you see when you look at these paintings? How would you title the paintings if given the chance?

Once learners have discussed Pollack’s work, let them know they will be creating their own action paintings. Review, or introduce, basic color theory at this point..

Action painting materials include primary color poster paint and large sheets of white paper. Paint will need to be applied using a variety of objects. Objects to apply paint can include: base balls, tennis balls, golf balls, and marbles. Other items such as a turkey baster, eyedropper, and string may also be used. Be creative when gathering objects that learners can use to apply paint. More variety in application objects will lead to a greater variety in paintings. Learners will also need standard gift boxes in which to place their painting while creating.

Continue the lesson by asking learners to take one sheet of paper and a gift box in which to lay their paper. Give each learner two tablespoons of three primary color paints – three primary colors arranged on paper plates in palette fashion. Ask learners to choose three objects to use to apply paint. Once learners have been given paint and objects, ask learners to apply paint using each object. Make sure learners

use all objects and colors, and cover the entire paper. Replenish learner paint as needed. After action paintings have been completed, let the action paintings dry by stacking boxes.

Divide into groups of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate; a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand; and a Scribe, who records group ideas. All learners will be artists presenting their action paintings, and participating in gallery development.

In groups, learners are responsible for creating an art gallery. Each art gallery must be named. Each group member's painting must be present in the gallery. Within each gallery, each artist is responsible for writing an artist statement. Each artist statement must include: a painting name, a 25-100-word (depending on age/grade) description of the painting, and three critiques of their painting. Each painting receives a critique by three group members. Each group member must critique at least one painting. Critiques must answer the following questions: What do I see first when I look at this painting? What does this painting makes me think of? How does this painting make me feel? How can I describe this painting?

Once paintings and artist statements have been finished, each group can prepare a gallery for paintings and artist statements to be viewed by the entire group. Galleries can be created from any available space. Encourage all learners to view each gallery. Galleries will be evaluated on completeness, creativity, and attention to detail.

After all galleries have been viewed, ask learners the following concluding questions: Were there any common themes across galleries? Were there any major differences across galleries? Were there common themes across paintings? Were there major differences across paintings? How would you describe action painting?

Connecting to Standards

- Reading Standards for Literature K-5-Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards K-5-Texts Types and Purposes
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Speaking and Listening K-5-Comprehension and Collaboration, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Language K-5-Knowledge of Language, Presentation of Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards K-5 Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use, Conventions of Standard English,

Middle School

Three Musicians

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

Pablo Picasso reflects, “The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.” The Blue Man thinks about art similarly. No dust gathers in a Blue Man show. The Blue Man show is about the soul. It is about the life force that connects us all. Blue Man speaks the language of music to move, inspire, and entertain. Picasso’s *Three Musicians* can provide a window into the art of the Blue Man. Much like the Blue Man, the three musicians defy the bounds of a traditional story with traditional characters. They do not play an easily recognizable song on easily recognizable instruments in easily recognizable places. Perhaps their music creates conversation? Perhaps their music leads to dancing? Perhaps their music agitates? Perhaps their music connects hearts? The Blue Man might do all that, too. This lesson will provide learners the opportunity to step inside the painting, create their own unique story, and wash off a little daily life dust.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by showing learners a slide of Picasso’s *Three Musicians*.

Ask learners several introductory questions such as: What do you see when you look at the painting? What is happening in the painting? What are the characters doing?

Continue the lesson by asking learners to consider several questions. The Huntington and Scott Gallery offers the following questions to ask when considering a work of art: Is there a central focus to this painting? Does the use of colors direct your attention in any special way? Can you imagine how the people in the painting feel? Does the painting have a mood—calm agitated, happy, sad, etc.? What contributes to this mood (color, composition, subject matter, lines, texture, etc.)? How would you describe the overall emotion of the painting? If you had to retitle this work, what would you call it and why?

Once *Three Musicians* has been discussed in general terms, let learners know they will be writing creative stories that describe the painting. The stories will be developed from individual reflection on a series of questions about the painting. The questions are as follows: Describe the musicians? Describe the musicians’ instruments. Describe the music the musicians are playing. Describe the place where the musicians are playing music? Give learners 15 minutes to respond to the questions individually on paper.

Continue the lesson by asking learners to take 15 minutes to begin to write a story about the *Three Musicians*. Make sure to consider character, plot, and setting. Make

sure learners know this will only be the beginning of a draft of the story. They might only be able to simply start telling their version of the story.

Once learners have completed starting their stories, have them share their stories in groups of 3-5 learners. Make sure all learners share their story.

After learners have shared their stories in their small groups, bring large group together for a concluding discussion. Ask them to consider the following questions: What are the similarities/differences in the descriptions of the musicians? What are the similarities/differences in the descriptions of the instruments? What are the similarities/differences in the descriptions of the music? In what ways does *Three Musicians* communicate different things to different people? How can art communicate different things to different people?

Connecting to Standards

- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Reading Standards for Literature K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards 6-12 Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

The Body Electric

High School

Applying The Blue Man Creative Impulses

Walt Whitman describes the beauty and complexity of the human body in his poem, *I Sing the Body Electric* (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174740>). The Blue Man sings the body electric, too. Through simply standing in his Blue body, the Blue Man sings the body electric. Through drumming and dancing, the Blue Man sings the body electric. Through listening and reacting, the Blue Man sings the body electric. This lesson will allow learners to practice closely observing the body and exploring the face and its capacity to communicate non-verbally. Learners will be

able to create a new perspective on the body and communication through documenting the story our faces tell.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by drawing upon previous experience with still life drawing. It would be best to try this lesson with learners who have experience with still life drawing. Two examples of how to teach still life drawing include: Still Life Lessons, <http://www.artfactory.com/still-life/still-life-lessons.html>, and jennarodriguez.com <http://jennarodriguez.com/high-school-lesson-plans/>

Continue the lesson by dividing the class into groups of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate, a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand, and a Scribe responsible for writing down group ideas. All learners will be Artists and Presenters.

Let learners know they will be extending their understanding of still life drawing to include capturing facial expressions. They will be using pencils to draw faces on large sheets of white paper. Explain that each group will choose one action from a list of actions. The actions can include pitching a baseball, digging a hole, changing a light bulb, holding a baby, jumping rope, running with a football, baking a cake, etc. Write all actions on cards, and ask each learner group to choose one card. Make sure all actions are specific and descriptive enough to allow learners to understand the action they will undertake.

Once learner groups have chosen an action, explain they will each be creating a still life of facial expressions. Ask two learners in each group to be the first models. Ask the models to repeatedly complete the action on the card. Ask models not to speak while completing the action. The group members that are not the models will draw the faces of the models. After 5 minutes of repeating the action, ask models to freeze. Encourage models to be as expressive as possible. Encourage drawers to be as detailed as possible. Allow drawers 15 minutes to draw the faces of the still models. After 20 minutes, have models and drawers change places. Each learner should have the opportunity to both model and draw. Encourage drawers to move around the room to capture facial expressions from different perspectives.

After everyone has modeled and drawn, ask learners to reflect on their drawing in their groups. Describe what was expressed in the expressions of the movers? What adjectives might describe the expression? How would they title their drawing?

Continue the lesson by asking learners to think about their drawing as if it were the basis of an idea for a movie. If the models in the drawing were actors in a movie, what would they say? Take 25 minutes to develop the start of a script. Each script will need to include a scene description which narratively describes the setting of the script, and a few lines of possible dialogue. Make sure the characters are given

names within the scripts. The scripts will not be complete at the end of the 25 minutes. Each group will have the beginning of one script.

Ask groups to share the drawings and scripts in front of the large group.

After learners have shared their scripts conduct large group, ask them to consider the following questions: What are the similarities/differences in the drawings? What are the similarities/differences in the scripts?

Connecting to Standards

- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Reading Standards for Literature K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards 6-12 Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity