

Hand in Hand: Abstract Paintings Inspired by Jean McEwen

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TOPICS: Creating painted texture; Identifying and combining primary and secondary colours; Creating abstract paper collages

SUBJECT(S): Visual Arts **GRADE(S):** K-3

UNIT DURATION: 3 lessons

OVERVIEW & CULMINATING TASK:

In this lesson sequence students will explore the abstract artwork of Jean McEwen and will experiment with creating painted textures using sponges and their fingers. Students will learn about primary and secondary colours and will combine their painted paper in the creation of a collage.

Jean McEwen was a Canadian painter known for his evocative abstractions which focused on light, gesture, and subtle color relationships. "There are two ways to judge a painting. One is based on criteria and theories of art. The second is based on the sensations we get before a picture. I paint the second way," he once said. McEwen studied pharmacy at the University of Montreal, while maintaining an interest in poetry and painting. In 1951, less than a year after his graduation, he decided to pursue a career as an artist and soon found that his interest was in non-representational expression and experiments. During his long career McEwen exhibited regularly and had his work selected for many private and public collections throughout Canada and the United States.

BIG IDEAS (What students will understand):

- Creative experiences involve an interplay between exploration, inquiry, and purposeful choice. (Arts Education 3)
- The mind and body work together when creating works of art. (Arts Education 3)
- Engagement in the arts creates opportunities for inquiry through purposeful play. (Arts Education 1)

CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES (What students will do):

- Create artistic works collaboratively and as an individual, using ideas inspired by imagination, inquiry, experimentation, and purposeful play
- Explore elements, processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, and techniques of the arts

CONCEPTS & CONTENT (What students will know):

- Image development strategies
- Elements of visual art; principles of design

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) (What students will keep considering):

- How can you create texture with paint using tools other than a paintbrush?
- How can you combine primary and secondary colours to create contrast?

FIRST PEOPLES' PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING:

Learning is holistic, reflexive, experiential, and relational.

MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES:

- digital image of *Ni Plus, Ni Moins* by Jean McEwen (see end of document)
- digital projector/computer
- 12" x 18" finger painting paper (approximately 2 sheets per student)
- small sponges (1 per student)
- painting smocks for students
- tempera paint in red, yellow, blue, and black (in squirt bottles)
- The book *Perfect Square* (2011) by Michael Hall
- plastic sheets or garbage bags to cover student desks with
- white glue
- glue pots and glue spreaders



Jean McEwen, *Ni Plus, Ni Moins* (No More, No Less), 1993, oil on canvas, 90" x 60". Image courtesy of the artist.

VOCABULARY:

texture, abstract art, primary colours, secondary colours, collage, contrast

RESOURCES & REFERENCES:

- <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artist/jean-mcewan>
- <http://www.afkeditions.com/artists/jean-mcewan/>
- <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/>

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES (Teacher Action/Student Action):

LESSON #1 (intro, painting with primary and secondary colours using sponges):

- Read *Perfect Square* by Michael Hall. Discuss how coloured paper can be used in different ways to create a variety of pictures. Ask students:
 - What tools do you think were used to create the painted paper in these illustrations?
- Display Jean McEwen's painting *Ni Plus, Ni Moins* (see end of document for large image). Pose the following discussion questions:
 - What tools do you think Jean McEwen has used to create the texture in this painting?
 - Can you see places that might be fingerprints or handprints in this painting?
 - What kinds of shapes has Jean McEwen used in his painting?
 - Why do you think he has only used rectangles?
 - What kinds of colours has Jean McEwen used?
- Explain to students that they will create textured painted paper inspired by Jean McEwen. They will later combine a variety of textured papers together to create a collage.
- Explain to students that they will experiment with a variety of painting tools to make different textures. They will start by painting paper using the primary colours (red, yellow, blue) and later the secondary colours (orange, green, purple).
- Students will work in pairs for this activity. Divide the class into 3 groups.
- Hand out one piece of paper per two students. Hand out one sponge per student.
- Give a squirt of yellow paint onto the paper of all the students in group 1. Group 2 gets a squirt of red and group 3 gets a squirt of blue.
- Students should use the sponges to fill their paper with paint. Add more paint to those that don't have enough to fill the page.

- Remove the finished papers and place them in a designated drying area.
- Hand out another sheet of paper to each pair of students. Give each pair a squirt of colour that they just painted with.
- Give half of the yellow students a small squirt of red. The other half get a small squirt of blue.
- Give half of the red students a small squirt of blue and the other half get a large squirt of yellow.
- Give half of the blue students a large squirt of red and the other half get a large squirt of yellow.
- Everyone will use their sponge to mix the paint on their paper. You may add some additional paint to those whose colour needs a boost.
- Encourage students to let a variety of shades of colour remain on the paper rather than mixing until the two paint colours are one.
- Remove papers and place them in the drying area.



Students with their painted paper in primary colours

LESSON #2 (finger painting and printing texture onto paper):

- Cover tables with plastic.
- Students will work in pairs.
- Put a squirt of black paint on the plastic between each pair.
- Have students use their fingers to spread the paint around and to experiment with creating a variety of lines and textures. A little more paint or a mist of water extends the finger painting fun.
- Instruct students to dry, not wash their hands.
- Demonstrate for students how to place a dry painting from Lesson #1, paint side down, onto the finger painting table. Have students rub

the back of the paper to make an impression of the finger painting on the coloured paper. Bring paper to drying area.

- Have students repeat this process until all of the primary and secondary colour paintings have black texture printed on them.



Students finger painting and printing their painted texture onto the painted paper from Lesson #1

- If the rectangular pieces do not initially fit onto the larger paper, students should rearrange them until they do. Students may also cut or tear pieces to make them smaller.
- Once they have arranged their compositions, students should use white glue to glue them down.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

At the end of Lesson #1 have students view the painted paper as a group and ask:

LESSON #3 (creating a collage with painted paper):

- Prior to this session cut each painting in half and have students choose one piece for the background of their composition.
- The remaining papers can be cut or torn by the teacher into rectangular shapes and then sorted into colour groups.
- Students will choose up to 5 pieces of paper from the rectangular colour bank.
- Explain to students that their chosen rectangular pieces must contrast with the background paper. High contrast pairs are: yellow/purple, orange/blue, and red/green.
- Instruct the students to arrange the cut out shapes so that they do not touch or overlap. The shapes should be arranged in a way so that there is still a 1-2 inch border of background showing.



-What kinds of textures were you able to make using the sponges?

-How are these textures different from those you can make with a paintbrush?

At the end of Lesson #2 have students view the painted paper as a group and ask:

-What kind of textures were you able to make using your fingers?

-How are these textures different from those you made with a sponge?

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After students complete their collages display them and pose the following reflection questions: Which collages show a strong contrast between the background and the glued on shapes? Can you identify the primary and secondary colours? How does the finger-painted texture transform the artwork? What would the artwork look like without texture?

EXTENSIONS & POSSIBLE CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

As a continuation of this lesson sequence the class could revisit the book *Perfect Square* by Michael Hall and create collaged compositions that feature shapes other than rectangles.



Finished student collage using rectangles of torn painted paper

AFK RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

Visit the AFK Resources page to find lesson plans for all grade levels!

<http://tiny.cc/AFKResources>



Jean McEwen, *Ni Plus, Ni Moins*
(No More, No Less), 1993, oil on
canvas, 90" x 60". Image
courtesy of the artist.