

LESSON 4 OF 10

Grid Art

by Debi West

I know most of you are saying, “Wow, Debi ... *really...*? Grid art?” My response? An emphatic *yes!* The reason? Because *it works!* Grid art builds student confidence like no other lesson I teach.

Grid art teaches our students the importance of measuring, proportion, line, shape, value and form, and it is the essence of taking them to the next level. I often tell my students that they are magicians and they must continue to practice to make others buy into their illusions—and this lesson is the *grand* illusion!

STUDENTS TAKING INTRODUCTION TO ART

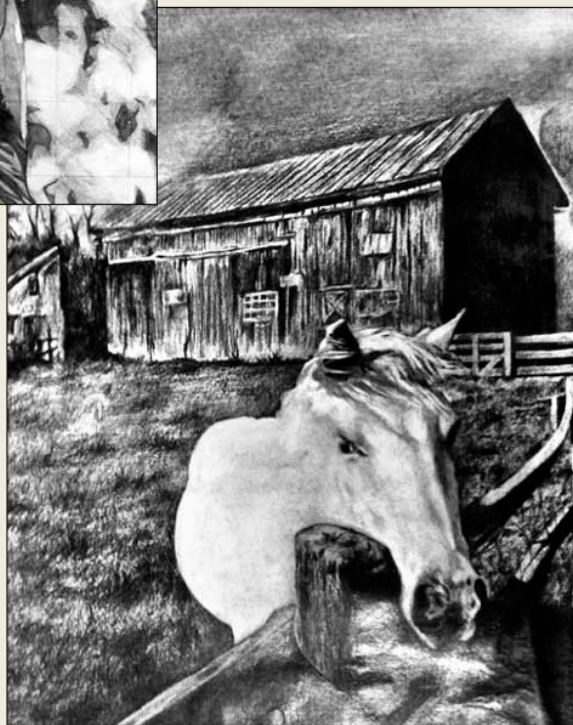
classes at the secondary level are often without a strong art foundation, and most truly believe they can't draw. This lesson helps them realize that they *can* draw—they just need to better understand the tools to get them to that level of mastery. And, this is the “game” that takes them there. It's not difficult and many of you have used this from the elementary level and up. Unfortunately, many secondary art teachers believe this lesson is perhaps too “elementary,” but I beg to differ. I have been privy to the results for eight years now, and I absolutely love seeing the excitement and authentic joy on my students' faces when they master a drawing by using this simple technique and begin to *really* understand the importance of the elements of art as the building blocks for successful artworks.

GRID ART: I have step-by-step directions that I teach my students to help ensure their success, and that begins with the right photographs to draw from. We use photos that have been photocopied from our school's photography books, but students are also allowed to bring in their own high-contrast black-and-white photos, if they want.

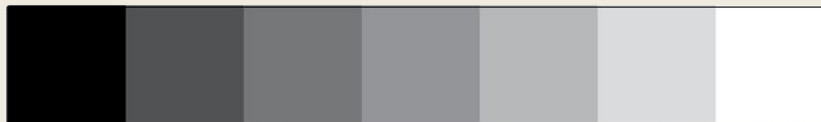
Once students all have their photos in hand, we talk about how to grid

them out. This is the tricky part! We start by gridding our 12" x 18" white paper, using 2-inch squares. I teach students how to keep their ruler lines straight by making two marks and then running their lines on the two marks. It takes some time and patience to ensure that every student has successfully gridded their white papers.

Once they see that they have six squares vertically, and nine square horizontally, they know that they must have the exact same number of squares on their photos. This too takes some math skill as well as some technical patience, but we all work together and are ready to begin the drawing process.



This is the lesson students are most excited to share with their friends and families. Our hallway art display is abuzz as many visitors come by to check out this amazing art!



Value is one of the most important elements of art when creating the illusion of depth in a 2-D artwork. Here is an example of a seven-step value scale (including white).



I have my students hold their photos upside down, this way, they aren't focused on the objects they see, they are focused on drawing the lines, shapes and values they see in each square. This is the key to their success, as it teaches them to draw *exactly* what they see, as opposed to what they *think* they see.

WE START WITH ONE SQUARE at a time. My job at this point is to remind

INTRO TO ART CURRICULUM SERIES

Grid Art

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

High-school "Art 1" students will ...

- learn the importance of drawing what they see by using the element of Value in an artwork.
- learn to create seven shades of gray scales from one pencil and use these value scales to draw from a gridded black-and-white image.

MATERIALS

- 12" x 18" white drawing paper
- Graphite pencils
- Erasers
- Rulers
- Photocopies of black-and-white reference photographs

PROCEDURES

1. Introduce the lesson by discussing the importance of value in an artwork.
2. Students will learn to make their own 7-toned value scale (black, dark-dark gray, dark gray, gray (middle tone), light gray, light-light gray and white).
3. Students will then select a reproduced, provided, black-and-white photograph and grid it out.
4. Students will grid out their paper, so that the same number of grid squares appear.
5. Students will turn their photograph upside down, focusing on the elements, not the objects in the image.
6. Students will then begin to draw what they see (line, shape and value) and place this into the grid.
7. Students will work slowly and upside down, so that they are not stressed with having to draw a "person" or a "zebra," and so on. I remind them that they are merely drawing lines, shapes and adding values and then a "person" or a "zebra" will appear (this is the most successful way to teach this technique, setting everyone up for success).
8. Students will work for about a week to complete this 12" x 18" final drawing.
9. Final art works will be mounted and hung in a class display and critiqued. This lesson is wonderful in that students are very proud of what they created using this grid art / value study technique.

ASSESSMENT

We do in-process critiques using my "2 Glows and a Grow" model: Each student selects a classmate's work that speaks to him/her and attaches three notes—two with what works, and one with what the artist might want to consider or change. There is also an evaluation form that prompts students to appropriately reflect on the learning at hand and provides space for them to comment on the process and how they feel their final piece turned out. There is also space for me to comment and give them a grade based on their learning and the final work.



Go to artsandactivities.com and click on this button for resources related to this article.

students to use their practice seven-shaded value scales to compare the shades, as I walk around the room encouraging them to keep going. The most fun is when I hold up their individual works and let them see it from a new perspective. I can't tell you how excited they are with what they are able to draw!

About a week later, most students have completed their drawings and then I show them how to mount their

work and successfully exhibit it.

This is the lesson students are most excited to share with their friends and families. Our hallway art display is abuzz as many visitors come by to check out this amazing art!

Next up...Creative Color Wheels! ■

Debi West, Ed.S, NBCT, is Art Department Chair at North Gwinnett High School in Suwanee, Ga. She is also an Arts & Activities Contributing Editor.