

LESSON 7 OF 10

## Watercolor Still-Life Work

by Debi West

I love to teach my students the magic of watercolor painting! As a watercolor artist, it's one of my favorite lessons. It's all about the experimentation and learning to trust that, often, watercolor is going to do what it wants to do. I often call this lesson, "embracing happy accidents!"

To begin the lesson, I introduce my students to watercolor terms, supplies and techniques. Each student receives a list of information, as well as a 12" x 18" piece of cold-press watercolor paper.

We discuss the difference between cold- and hot-press papers and boards, the different types of watercolors and brushes, and all of the ways in which artists can creatively manipulate watercolor to play with value and color mixing.

Next, students fold their paper into 24 squares by folding the paper in half, then folding it into thirds. They then open the paper up and fold it twice vertically. They then have their areas in which they will experiment and play.

On the hand-out I give them, several watercolor techniques are listed—wet on dry, wet on wet, resist, drip, gradient values, salt, alcohol, white ink pen, plastic-wrap pull, paper-towel prints, and so on. I have students select 24 and practice each one in a specific square on their paper.

By giving my students this time to experiment and play with watercolor, it frees them up for the actual art lesson. It also teaches them that watercolor "bleeds" can be very interesting and that oftentimes, the looser they are with the paint and water, the more successful and creative their final pieces will be.



Students sketch out a contour drawing of the still lifes on watercolor paper, concentrating on what they see.



In pencil, students grid their sheets, then fill the squares with specific techniques, using the colors in the arrangements



Students filled the squares with various watercolor techniques—wet on dry, wet on wet, resist, drip, gradient values, salt, alcohol, white ink pen, plastic-wrap pull, and so on.



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## LESSON 7 OF 10



## INTRO TO ART CURRICULUM SERIES

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- learn techniques needed to make beautiful and creative watercolor paintings.
- incorporate their grid art skills, their direct observation skills and their watercolor technique skills into a final artwork.

## MATERIALS

- 12" x 18" watercolor paper (two pieces per student), watercolor palettes, brushes, water cups
- Baskets of materials, including salt, alcohol, crayon resist, plastic wrap, pencils, oil pastel, netting, screens, masking tape, paper clips, etc.

## PROCEDURES

1. Introduce the lesson by showing a Powerpoint on watercolor techniques.
2. Give students hand-outs of watercolor techniques.
3. Students will fold their first piece of paper into 24 squares, and create a study of various watercolor techniques and washes in each area.
4. Students will then lightly outline a contour drawing of flowers in a vase on their second piece of paper.
5. Students will grid out that paper lightly in pencil, creating 24 squares similar to their folded practice sheet.
6. Students will then begin to paint each gridded area using one of the newly

learned watercolor techniques.

7. Students will look at the still life, but have the creative license to add their own color, textures, etc., as learned in the first study.
8. Students will ensure that there is unity in the background.
9. Final artworks will be hung in a class display and critiqued.

**Note:** This lesson is wonderful in that students are very proud of what they create and enjoy making the connections to some of their earlier assignments, while having the freedom to experiment and learn about watercolor media.

## 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.

Once we complete our experimentation days, we then move into the actual lesson. I set up artificial-flower arrangements at each table and have students lightly sketch out a contour of what they see onto a 12" x 18" white watercolor paper, as I reiterate the importance of direct observational drawing and still-life work.

Once the still life has been drawn, students use pencil to grid out their sheets into squares, similar to their practice sheets. Then the fun begins!

Students go back and refer to their experimental papers, find the techniques they enjoyed, and then work in

each grid-square of their still-life drawings using a specific technique and the colors they see in their still-life flower arrangements.

This lesson is so successful because it teaches my students to use their art skills and their direct-observation skills, and to push their creativity as they paint a unique and original watercolor still life!

Next up ... Acrylic Fruit Studies! ■

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