In this painting, excited is represented in many ways. One way is that it is full of bright colors and a few dark colors. When the two types of colors are next to each other they seem to contrast with one another. Excited by Phil Brew, grade nine.

The Original Lesson

The objective for the original lesson was to create a painting for which the colors, lines, and shapes communicate a mood. Students were guided through a series of analog line drawings made in response to words that describe states of mind such as joyful, peaceful, lonely, and angry. Students were shown how to select a composition based on one of the line drawings, trace it onto an 8 x 8" (20 x 20 cm) format, and create a pattern by tracing the square multiple times onto a larger board. I introduced the color wheel and reviewed a variety of standard color schemes. After a color-mixing demonstration and several sketchbook practices, the students were asked to select a minimum of five colors that communicat the same mood as that of their chosen analog line pattern; the five colors also had to fit one of the color schemes. Using pastels, students created a color template for painting their mood design, and

Changing the Mood

Stacey McKenna

How do you transform an ordinary design problem into one that contains personal meaning for each student—a lesson that allows each student to express something authentic about him/herself? After discussions with members of the Study Group for Holistic Art Education at the Maryland Institute College of Art, and after creating several original holistic art problems, I began to wonder how I could re-address my entire Art 1 curriculum so that the students' minds, bodies, and spirits were engaged with each learning experience. I was intimidated by the prospect of creating new lessons for an entire course. I wondered if I could simply improve upon existing lessons by asking more thought-provoking questions and providing real experiences. The following is a look at my first experiment with this.

Emily Fong, Patience.

This work represents the optimistic side of my complex personality. In my mind, I equate circles with happiness, so there are a lot of circles in Optimism. The jax-like shapes are like exuberance or spontaneity, which come with optimism. The main color is orange, as seen in the jax-shapes, some circles, and the background. The designs on some of the circles are mainly circular or curved, which represent easy-goingness. All in all, this is a very optimistic piece. Optimism by Laura Magers, grade twelve.

finally began to mix colors and paint following specific guidelines: no colors straight from the tube, at least one color must be a tint, tone or shade, the board must be completely covered, colors in repeated shapes must match exactly, and the edges of shapes must be painted cleanly and crisply.

Each time I taught the lesson students were always engaged in the painting process and consistently had great success in learning how to mix color and apply paint. We finished the lesson with a written reflection. Students were asked to identify the elements of art and principles of design used, and to explain the process they went through in creating the painting, step by step.

The New Holistic Lesson

The lesson began as before: a series of non-representational line drawings made in response to the adjectives describing moods. We compared the class results, discovering many simi-larities of form and interpretation. Our discovery led to a discussion of the possibility that any art element freed from representation might still communicate an idea that could be understood by others.

Color Experience

Taking nothing with them, students followed me out of our room and into a large, carpeted auditorium foyer. The entire class of thirty-four students sat comfortably in a large circle. Students helped me place 150 sheets of 4 x 6" (10 x 15 cm) color paper in the middle of our circle. Each sheet was a different hue. There was some space between every sheet and all were visible. We returned to the circle and I began our game. I asked students to imagine that they each had been selected for a new episode of *Survivor*. We would be leaving on a boat to get to the island and space was limited. The only parcels permitted for each person were the three most essential quali-ties of their character or personality. I asked students to identify three colors that might communicate each of their three chosen qualities. Using only orientation, proximity, and over-lapping, students arranged their col-ored papers on the floor in such a way as to best convey the relationship of these three qualities as they believed them to exist in their personalities. They arranged and rearranged, alter-ing their compositions by mere cen-timeters. I then announced that our little boat was being tossed in a very bad storm, and the only way to pre-vent it sinking was to lighten our load. Each person would have to give up one of the three qualities—the least necessary. Students then rearranged the two remaining color papers to best represent themselves. I told students that we were now on the actual island, but food was low and everyone was hot and tired. The only way we would all make it was if each of us sacrificed one of the two remaining qualities, keeping only the one that would most benefit the group. I asked students to share with the class which qualities they gave up, and which one they had decided to keep. As we went around the cir-cle, students identified qualities in themselves such as crazy, optimistic, friendly, angry, lonely, creative, intel-ligent, motivated, thoughtful, gener-ous, passionate, gentle, strong, and resourceful. After sharing our color metaphors, we returned to the class-room.

What is important is not style, but rather personal meaning.

The Design

I changed the design portion of the lesson radically. My revised objective was to create a nonobjective design using line, shape and color to metaphorically represent the essen-tial aspect(s) of each student's person-ality. In their sketchbooks, students made a nonobjective line design that represented the most essential aspects of their personalities. They developed line designs by tracing an analog drawing they had made ear-lier, combining two or more analog

drawings, or creating a new analog line design to represent one or more of their three essential personality traits. The only requirement for the final line design was that the finished work contain at least eight different shapes (so that students would be able to mix and paint up to eight different colors). I eliminated the requirement to create a pattern, as the regularity of a symmetrical design might not best express every student's mood. Instead, we talked about the difference between pattern and repetition, and included them as options for creating the designs.

When choosing colors, students had to include the final most essential color from the *Survivor* game, and a minimum of five different mixed colors in their finished work. We reviewed the color wheel, color schemes, and color mixing. Students were required to take careful notes in their sketchbooks. They used this information on an as-needed basis. In this new version of the lesson, students did not have to adhere to a specific color scheme; they simply had to make the best possible representation of their personality/mood.

The Painting Process

I demonstrated painting techniques just as before, but this time, instead of limiting students to crisp edges and smoothly applied paint, they had the options of soft edges, to blend edges, to paint thick and thin, and to layer and scumble. We looked at the aesthetic qualities of smooth and rough brushstrokes, and large and small brushstrokes. I asked students how they might know which technique to use, and students made suggestions such as "You might want to use a rough and thick stroke to express a very emotional state of mind." I told the class that artists do what "feels right" for what they want to communicate. In other words, what is important is not style, but rather personal meaning.

The Finished Paintings

In the original lesson, student works had very closely resembled one another; the results from this new version were very individualized. Before students made paintings based

on a general idea of a mood that they may or may not have experienced intensely in their own lives; now they were basing their work on personal ideas for which they were the only experts—their own moods.

What I Am to Me

Instead of identifying the elements and principles, and explaining the process, I asked students to title their work, and then to write a short paragraph in response to the following question: "In what ways do the choices you made for this work represent you? You might want to consider some or all of the following: line, shape, color, composition, brushstroke, paint quality."

Considering the Work of Others

We put the work on the critique wall with labels identifying each work's title. Students were invited to share how they had used the elements of art and principles of design to communicate their idea. Some were understandably reticent as the metaphors were often very personal.

So I asked students to choose a peer's painting that they wanted to talk about, and after careful looking and selecting, each student shared with the class what they found intriguing about a particular work: what techniques had been used and how that artist seemed to be using the elements and principles to communicate the idea (indicated by the title). I was able to check for learning, and students were given an opportunity to share ideas and to appreciate one-another's work. ✍

My picture describes my mellowness. The lines that I used were rounded and wavy. This was so they seemed flowing and in motion. Some of the shapes are overlapping because everything normally comes together when you're mellow. The main color that I used was blue because it is a calm color. The other colors contrast with it so that's why I chose them. I chose these shapes so that they appear to be floating on the "mellow" blue. Swirl by Daniel Hammond, grade ten.