ABC

Hands-On Art
for Children

An Honors Thesis
(Honors 499)

by

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December 1996
This project is a children's ABC art book in which each page is devoted to one letter of the alphabet. On each page an artist or artwork; period or style of art; and an element, technique, or principle of art is discussed -- each beginning with the same letter of the alphabet. The ABC format provides a common theme that is familiar to children and is easy to follow. It also allows children to flip through the book in a non-linear manner, instead of reading page by page. An interactive aspect in which children physically manipulate the book (pop-up or fold-out mechanisms, for example) is also incorporated for each letter in order to actively engage the reader. Because some of the vocabulary and ideas presented may be rather advanced, the book's targeted audience is upper elementary students (grades 3-6).

Educational Objectives:

1. To stimulate an interest in art through visual and tactile interaction
2. To provide an abridged introduction to art
3. To build an art vocabulary through a familiar ABC format
4. To develop an allusory base
5. To serve as a quick reference tool
Abstract Expressionism

This style of painting began in the early 1940's and ended in the 1960's. Abstract Expressionists believed that the process of painting was just as important (if not more so) than the product. These painters no longer followed the traditional technique of creating recognizable objects; instead, they splashed paint on canvases and let it take shape and dry.

Ansel Adams was an American photographer known for his landscape (forests, rivers, and mountains) photographs of the Western United States during the 20th century. He strongly believed that photographs should be simple, detailed, and focused on the objects being photographed.
**ASYMMETRY**

Asymmetry is a principle of art that shows unidentical sides in a composition. Fold over the plastic of the top picture and see how the shapes match up. This is called symmetry. Now fold over the plastic on the bottom picture. The shapes do not match up because the picture is asymmetrical.
Economy is the technique of using as few colors, shapes, and colors as possible while still creating art that can be easily recognized. Japanese artists excel at using this technique. Notice in the pictures above and to the right that there is little detail or color. Even so, images of horses, trees, and a house are noticeable.
M.C. Escher was a Dutch artist of the 20th century. He created artwork that combined perspective and optical illusion that seemed to trick the mind. For example, in the picture to the far left, the drawing hands appear to come out of the paper and draw themselves. We know that this cannot happen, but the art visually shows that it can. Escher also created visual puzzles in which an object is repeated to form a pattern that can seemingly continue on forever. Notice how the red, yellow, and green lizards (left) fit together perfectly. The zipper bag at the right contains puzzle pieces that can be put together to make an Escher artwork. Try to put them together. It is more difficult than it appears!

Egyptian Art is especially valued because it is so old and rare. Because the Egyptians believed in life after death, they buried their rulers with many jewels and riches. The gold burial mask of King Tut (above, left) is a good example of this Egyptian practice. The image of Queen Nefertiti (above, right) shows how Egyptian sculpture became less stiff and more life-like through the centuries.
GRIDS

Grids are useful drawing tools. By laying a grid over a picture, an artist can visually divide the picture into squares. The image can then be easily drawn section by section.
The Gothic style flourished during the 12th through the 16th centuries in Europe, mostly England and France. Chartres Cathedral (above) is a wonderful example of Gothic architecture because it shows rose (stained glass) windows, elongated sculpture, and pointed arches that were new features at that time.
**Lithography** is a printing process in which a design is drawn on a flat stone block with a grease crayon. Ink is applied to the stone and shows only the ungreased areas of the design. Kathe Kollwitz produced lithography prints during the early 20th century. Most of her work depicts the suffering and unrest she witnessed in Germany. "Pieta III." (right) which means "pity," was printed in 1903.

**Leonardo da Vinci** worked during the High Italian Renaissance (1500 - 1520 AD). One of his most famous paintings is "The Last Supper," above. Notice how all the diagonal lines in the ceiling and on the walls come together at Christ's head in the center of the composition; hence, he is the focal point of the painting. The apostles and hand gestures point in Christ's direction, and the windows on the far wall provide a light/dark contrast that further highlight Christ.
LINE
A line is simply the path left by a moving point. Lines can be thick, thin, curvy, straight, vertical, horizontal, or diagonal. There are two kinds of lines:

Implied Lines ———— broken lines
Actual Lines ———— unbroken lines

Study “The Last Supper” (below, left). How many implied and actual lines can you find?

The Mona Lisa
This is Leonardo’s most famous painting. He perfected sfumato, the layering of glaze paints when he painted this wife of an Italian merchant. Her steady gaze, hint of a smile, and hand positions make her very realistic and life-like.
Perspective is a technique of creating the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface like a canvas or wall. In the picture to the right, notice how both the tops and bases of the trees seem to follow a line that eventually disappears in the distance at the horizon line. Also notice that the trees are smaller in the background than they are in the foreground. These two principles of implied lines and diminishing shapes are important aspects of linear perspective.
Pointillism is a method of applying “points” of pure color so closely that the human eye visually mixes the colors into shapes and forms. This style is most often associated with the French painter Georges Seurat. Look closely at the painting to the left, “Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte,” and you will see the individual specks that blend to make the forms of people, trees, and animals.

Pablo Picasso

Picasso was one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. He created many paintings, sculptures, and lithographs. Notice in the pictures to the left and above that the women’s bodies are broken into shapes like puzzle pieces and then put back together. This style of painting, Cubism, was developed by Picasso and Georges Braque. Cubists also tried to paint all sides of three-dimensional objects on a flat canvas.
Educational Theory Base for

ABC Hands-On Art
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This book was designed and written to fulfill an honors elementary education undergraduate thesis requirement. A strong interest in art and a love for writing children's books prompted this project topic. Clear objectives supported by educational theory make this book a solid educational tool and valuable resource for parents and teachers of upper elementary school children.

This book was designed to stimulate an interest in art through visual and tactile interaction with text and pictures. It is commonly believed that children learn best by doing. Piaget states that children proceed through developmental stages. The children for whom this book is intended (ages 7-11) are at the concrete-operational stage, meaning they need to be physically engaged in their learning. In accordance with this theory, each page of the book involves some sort of manipulative device that gives children hands-on opportunities to explore art. Examples of such interactives are felt boards and shapes on the “B” and “O” pages, transparency lift-ups on the “P,” “R,” and “X” pages, and the art production areas on the “J” and “Q” pages. These activities encourage children to touch and do; they entice the reader to learn.

This book was also designed to provide an abridged introduction to art. For each letter of the alphabet (X and Z excepted), an artist or artwork; art style or period; and a technique, element, or principle of art is shown. Each of these three topics begins with the same letter of the alphabet, depending upon the page. The letter of the alphabet provides an organizational framework that is visually
repeated throughout the page. For example, on the “A” page three A’s span the background of the page. Ansel Adams, Abstract Expressionism, and Asymmetry provide text content and visuals. The transparency flips demonstrate asymmetry, fulfilling the interactive aspect of the book. In addition, a small A is placed left of the gutter (center), thus completing the letter organization of the page. The page is also visually organized by primary colors and asymmetrical balance, and each picture and text block is matted on black paper to provide continuity and coherence within the page.

Piaget’s learning theories also support the letter and visual organizers on each page. Schema theory states that humans are born with the tendency to organize information through a kind of internal file folder system called schemata. The familiar pattern of the alphabet, firmly established in the targeted readers’ minds, is the primary schema for each page. The alphabet sets up an immediate structure even before any text is read; readers know that the art ideas on the page will all begin with the same letter. This helps to keep the unfamiliar art concepts neatly ordered and arranged so that learning can occur.

Another objective of the book is to develop the allusionary base of the reader. Because this book is filled with over 100 pictures of famous artworks, the reader is visually bombarded; however, the reader is not overwhelmed because each page is organized by the predictable alphabet. The purpose, then, for the visual bombardment is to immerse the reader in famous artwork so that these images become more and more familiar. It is the ultimate intention for the reader to encounter one of the artworks at a later date and be able to identify it, or at least show some form of recognition or understanding.

The final objective is to serve as a quick reference tool in the classroom or at home. This book is not a complete art reference by any means, but careful selection of artists, artworks, styles, elements, principles, and techniques was
made. Again, the alphabet provides a familiar organizer. Children are accustomed to looking up concepts in dictionaries and encyclopedias where the alphabet is also the primary organizer. In the same way children have access to English vocabulary and various topics of interest, this book provides a familiarly organized opportunity with art and hands-on art exploration.

This book is unique in its design and intention. Few children’s art books are alphabetically organized, and an art book with an interactive element for every page has yet to be seen. The objectives of the book are created from an art educator’s standpoint: to stimulate interest in art through hands-on interaction, to provide an abridged art introduction, to develop an allusionary base, and to serve as a quick reference tool. Because this book can be backed by educational theory, it is a valuable educational tool for children and adults alike.

Bibliography
