

Key Ideas

- Balance, repetition/variety and focal point are principles for composing or organizing the elements of design.
- Composition contributes expressive qualities to works of art.
- Artists use various combinations of balance, repetition/variety and focal point to express their ideas and feelings.

Program Summary

Don's work on a picture of one of his favorite characters, Anita Eggplant, leads to a discussion of composition with THE BIG A children. He explains that composition is the way in which the elements of design are organized. The children demonstrate their grasp of the three principles of composition—balance, repetition/variety and focal point—by playfully acting them out.

In search of more ideas for compositions, Don and the children take their Idea Books to a Farmers' Market. When Don looks at Bryan's sketches of fish, he suggests that Bryan visit painter Alfredo Arreguin. Arreguin teaches Bryan how to organize a painting through repetition and variety. The trip to the market also gives Don some ideas for his Anita Eggplant composition, resulting in an animated sequence that illustrates the uses of balance and focal point. From these experiences, the children can describe how artists use balance, repetition/variety and focal point to express ideas and feelings. The children's own compositions reflect their awareness.

Key Words

balance—the actual equality of lines, shapes, colors or textures in a composition, or the visual illusion of equality.

composition—the way in which the elements of design are organized in a work of art. Three principles of composition are balance, repetition/variety and focal point.

focal point—the place where a viewer's eye is drawn in a work of art. A focal point can be created by strengthening lines, shapes, colors or textures.

repetition—the repeated use of one or more of the elements of design in a work of art.

variety—the use of the elements of design in different ways.

Featured Artwork

Ships Riding on the Seine at Rouen; Claude Monet; National Gallery of Art, Washington; Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection (Date: 1872; Canvas; 14 7/8" x 18 3/8" (0.378 x .0466 cm.))

The Hundred Black Crows (detail); Japanese, Edo period, c.1650; Pair of six-panel screens, ink and gold on paper; Each screen H: 61 3/4" (156.9 cm.) W: 139" (353.1 cm.); Seattle Art Museum; Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection; 36.21

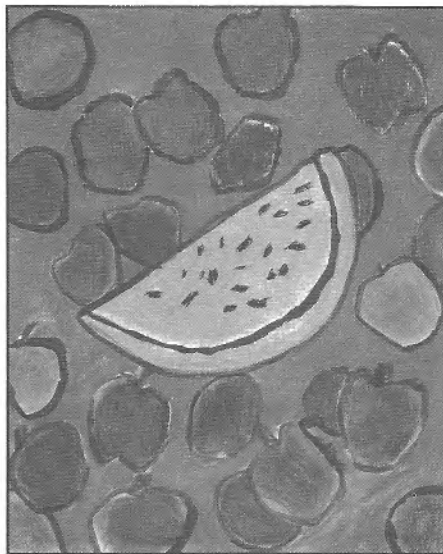
The Propeller; George C. Ault; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution (Date: 1922; Oil on Paperboard; 20" x 16")

Realto; Alfredo Arreguin; 1985; Oil on canvas; H: 48" x W: 48"

Before the Program

Ask your students to stand up with their arms straight out to the side and their feet close together. Ask them all to lean to one side as far as they can until they start to fall off balance.

Explain that being off balance can happen in a work of art when all the elements of design (lines, shapes, colors and textures) aren't put together well. Tell the class that this program is about balance and other things that will help them put the elements together in their artwork.



After the Program

Recall the Program

Ask the students to name the three principles of composition: balance, repetition/variety and focal point. Write these words on the board. Have the students act them out like THE BIG A children did. What did THE BIG A children learn about composition? Where did they visit to get ideas for composition?

Discuss Ideas for Creating Art

What could the class look at to get ideas for composition? Could they look in their Idea Books? Discuss and demonstrate possibilities for combining sketches that will *balance* one another. Consider changing their size, color and texture to achieve a *focal point*. Show ways to *repeat* the same shape and add *variety*.

NOTE: The artwork created by THE BIG A children was actually produced in stages and required several class periods to complete.

Create Art

A good medium for studying composition is colored paper collages. Shapes can be cut out, moved around on the background paper and tested for position, size and color before making a final decision. (See "Colored Paper Collage" in the Appendix.)

Respond to Art

Display several works of art by different artists. Can the students find the focal points in each work? Do they recognize shapes and colors that are repeated, and elements that add variety? Are they able to see how balance is achieved?

Invite the students to try to feel, and then talk about, the overall mood in the works of art. Encourage them to describe how balance, repetition/variety and focal point contribute to mood and feeling. (For example, "The big shapes balance one another and make the sculpture feel solid and strong." "The way these arches repeat one another gives it a graceful feeling." "This man is the focal point." "It makes the picture scary.")

Invite the students also to describe how they used the composition principles in their own completed artwork. Help them realize how the composition affects their feelings as they view their work.