

Watercolour: White Space & Resist

by Kim Fjordbotten

Materials

Set of Staedtler or Pentel tube watercolours
Set of watercolour brushes
Watercolour paper cut to approx. 6x8"

Goal

Students will learn how to go with the flow, mixing watercolours while controlling shapes and edges using wet & dry techniques as well as resist.

Art Concepts

Use whites to create both positive and negative space. **Resist** techniques in art use the incompatibility of two mediums to create layered effects with colour and texture. Children often discover **resist** techniques by experimenting with watercolour paints and crayons on paper. This is different from **masking**, which is the use of materials to protect areas from change.

Project

Create an image where the background describes the subject but the subject remains unfinished. What is the least amount of visual information you need to provide to viewers before they know what the image is or get a feel for the emotion you are conveying in your work?

Preparation 1: Control Shape

Did you know that if the paper is flat, wet colour will only flow to where the paper is wet? Artists can use the surface tension of water to control their designs. Let's experiment with this.

1. Dampen the paper to create a nice wet puddle.
2. Drop two colours into the puddle. Watch as they mix and blend.
3. Now take a wet brush and lightly touch it to the wettest edge of your coloured puddle. You will see the colour flow rapidly into the new wet area.
4. Let this dry and use later for the Watercolour Blobimal project inspired by Carla Sonheim.



Some logos make
good use of positive
& negative space

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Preparation 2: Free-flow Colour Mixing & Positive/Negative Space

Try to mix as many versions of a secondary colour as possible using a combination of free-flowing, accidental mixes and brush-blended colours. Let paper dry and then cut out a positive image. Glue both images side by side and label one as positive and the other as negative. Trick: Both images now have a positive and negative shape. Does it matter which one is which? Not really, because you need one to see the other.



Positive versus negative – Elementary
Figure/ground ambiguity – Junior/Senior

Project 3: Saving Details Using Masking Fluid as a Resist

When you want the freedom to apply broad colour washes across your painting surface but do not want the colour wash to cover key details within a composition then Masking Fluid can help.

Apply Masking Fluid directly on the paper. It can be applied to white paper or previously coloured areas, and it acts like a skin over those areas you want to protect from the colour wash. Once you have finished applying the colour wash you can simply remove the Masking Fluid.

Masking Fluid has a slight yellow or blue tint, making it easier to see where it has been used.

Here are some helpful tips to get the best results from using Masking Fluid.

1. Shake the bottle before use.
2. Do not use on wet or damp paper.
3. Use old brushes or dip pens to avoid damaging valuable brushes.
4. Wash brushes in soapy water immediately after use.
5. Ensure Masking Fluid is dry before applying colour wash.
6. Do not leave Masking Fluid on paper for long periods of time.
7. If spilt by accident, wash item immediately in soapy water. Once dry, the latex can only be removed by picking at it or rubbing with an eraser. There are no solvents available to dissolve Masking Fluid.

Understanding positive & negative shapes will help students plan ahead. Areas of interest may be covered in Masking Fluid to protect the white paper. Then, a generous, smooth wash of colour can fill the background. Leave to dry. Remove Masking Fluid, then paint colour and details on the white space.

