

Sea Turtle Dot Painting

K-5

Objective: Students will create a simple symbol dot painting in the style of the aborigines of Australia.

Topics & Keywords for Discussion:

Symbolism: a style of art in which ideas are expressed through symbols, emphasizing the meaning behind the simple form.

Materials: pencils, watercolor paper, paint, paintbrushes, cups of water, turtle pattern.



Opening activity: Share with students about the indigenous people of Australia, known as the Aborigines. Because the Aborigines of Australia did not have a written language, they used pictures and icons to share ideas and tell stories. Each tribe had their own sacred rituals which they guarded, and they would draw with sticks in the dirt or paint symbols on bodies which could be washed away after their ceremonies were over. It wasn't until the 1970's that Aboriginal artists began to transfer their drawings to canvas. In order to "camouflage" the sacred meanings of many of their paintings, impressionistic dots were used, and only those who knew the meaning of the symbols could interpret the paintings. Most of the paintings are centered around nature or creation. Today, Aboriginal Dot Painting is prized throughout the world and has become a source of income to the Aboriginal people.

Core Activity: Distribute the watercolor paper, pencils. Walk the students through drawing the outline of the turtle: shell first, circle or oval. Give your turtle an oval for a head and a triangle on the opposite side of his shell. Your turtle's legs could be rectangles or shape them like boomerangs. After sketching the outline, pick a light, solid color to paint the turtle. Then, choose a different color to paint small dots throughout the background. When the turtle background paint has dried, design their shell with a multicolored dot pattern. If you are feeling ambitious, you can trace the turtle's head, legs and tail with dots.

While students are painting their turtles, share with them that a number of native peoples, close and distant relatives of the aborigines of Australia, told stories about all aspects of life on earth, nature and the seasons in order to preserve their culture and to share an understanding of how their people fit into the whole of the patterns on the planet. Some native tribes told the story of the earth as if it was constructed on the back of a giant turtle's shell, that this one giant sea turtle was carrying the WHOLE WORLD on its back.

Today, we know that sea turtles are indeed amazing creatures. They are born on land and must first dig their way out of their sandy nest, racing to get to the water where they can more easily escape predators and also feed on jellyfish, tiny crabs and seaweed. They swim, literally, around the world, but when it's time for a sea turtle to lay eggs it will return to a beach within a MILE of where it was born to build a nest and fill it with eggs. Whole lineages of turtles are born, year after year, on the same beaches as their grandparents, great grandparents and beyond!

Reflection: Ask students what the symbol of the sea turtle might stand for today, and have them discuss other symbols and what they might represent.

