ENGAGING GRADES K-2 WITH {SANCTUARY}
Investigating the use of line and color as means to express an idea of sanctuary in art.

In this lesson, students will learn about the artworks of John Akomfrah, Cornelia Parker, and Jeffrey Gibson.

They will investigate the use of line and color in these artists’ works, as well as consider the history of pigments (Akomfrah).

To cement and build on their learning, students will compare the use of line and color in two works (Parker and Gibson).

With this vocabulary and further understanding of the work, students will reflect on how each artist has used line and color to express a notion of sanctuary. Students will then think about the idea of sanctuary and what it means to them.
The elements of Line and Color

Line and color are two of the elements of art, along with shape, form, and texture.

Artists use these elements in different ways in their work.
Activity

Line

Invite students to walk around the room, identify a rug they like, and stand on it. Ask them to look for any type of lines (straight, thick, thin, curvy). Have students walk on or trace with their hands and eyes the different types of lines on their rugs while describing their path.

Discussion Points

A line is a mark moving through space.

- What types of lines can you see: thick, thin, wavy, curvy, horizontal, diagonal, vertical, bold, faint?

- Look at the way the rug uses lines in its main format or composition. Is the design laid out on a vertical or horizontal plane? Why might the artist have chosen this? Does it look like a rug or a picture?

Color

Divide the children into teams for warm colors (reds, yellows, oranges, and red-violets) and cool colors (blues, blue-greens, and blue-violets) from the color wheel. Ask them to work as a team to find a rug that is mainly cool or warm in color.

Discussion Points

Color is what we see because of reflected light.

Light contains different wavelengths of energy that our eyes and brain “see” as different colors.

When light hits an object, we see the colored light that reflects off the object!

- What colors can you see in the rugs? Can you use creative words to describe them (e.g., citrus orange)?

- Warm colors—reds, yellows, oranges, and red-violets—are those of fire and the sun. They appear to project. Cool colors—blues, blue-greens, and blue-violets—are those of ice and the ocean. They appear to recede. Can you find a rug that uses warm and cool colors? Which colors are most commonly used in this room?

- Which colors represent home and which represent faraway lands to you? Why?
Natural pigments made from rocks, minerals, and plants have been used in art since prehistory. John Akomfrah’s rug design for Sanctuary, titled The Cave, looks at some of our first art. This kaleidoscopic pattern based on prehistoric paintings from Argentina’s Cueva de las Manos shows us Akomfrah’s idea that these caves and their art were our first sanctuaries. According to Akomfrah, “Inside these interlocking caves are some of our first signatures of an idea.”
Activity

Discuss as a group what organic substances found in nature might produce the colors in the yarns of the rugs and talk about the properties of these sources.

Discussion Points

- Describe the types of colors and lines you see in this work. What natural materials might people have used to paint on the walls of caves? How does this work make you feel? What does it make you wonder?

- What plants, vegetables, rocks, or minerals might have been used to create some of the colors in this rug?

- From ancient times, many prized colors (lapis lazuli, ochre) were transported over great distances, at great cost. Has the ease of access to color today made them more or less valuable? Do you think access to color has changed the way artists work? How?

- Some artists depict sound as color in their art. Do you think sounds have color? Think of some everyday sounds (footsteps, birds singing, babies crying, music). What colors would they be?

- Why do you think the artist used these images from the cave to show his idea of sanctuary? Explore some words that describe how you feel in a cave. Can you imagine how the people who painted in Cueva de las Manos felt in their cave?

Activity

Think about what the lines and colors can symbolize and how they can be used in art to represent ideas of sanctuary.

Sanctuary is defined as a place of refuge or safety, for people and animals. The word was originally used to describe a sacred place. Wildlife sanctuaries, like the wetlands around the bay, are safe places for animals to live and thrive. In this same way, different places can become sanctuaries for people when their homes and countries are no longer safe due to major events like natural disasters and war. In this space, you can see works that express the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of many different artists from countries all around the world. Each artist was asked to think about what sanctuary means to them. It is fun to explore their different ways of sharing this personal expression.
Comparing Two Artworks

In the Sanctuary works Worry Lines by Cornelia Parker and The Only Way Out Is Through by Jeffery Gibson, the artists have used line and color in different ways to express their understanding of sanctuary. Use words and ideas explored together to think about what sanctuary means to each of us as individuals.
Introducing the Artists

About Cornelia Parker
Cornelia Parker was born in the UK. She likes to make art with found objects. She will pick things up that are not being used and start using them in a different way. She likes to make you guess what they were and how they are being recreated as new objects, because for her your interpretation adds new meaning to the object.

In her Sanctuary work, Worry Lines, Parker used a photo of a black safety net being pulled in different ways. She is showing the netting’s potential to offer safety and protection to some and to act as a trap or snare to others.

About Jeffrey Gibson
Gibson was born in the United States of Native American heritage. Much of his art explores the differences and crossover in his cultural roots, both in his artistic practice (aesthetically) and as an individual member of an “outsider” community.

Gibson’s work for Sanctuary, The Only Way Out Is Through, is an exploratory mix of woven artistry from his Native American ancestry and techniques used in Western art movements like Op art, from the 1970s.
Activity

Gather children together between these two rugs to build on their investigations of line and color in making a comparison of the works.

Discussion Points

- What similarities and differences can you see in the artworks? Which rug do you like more and why?

- What do you notice about the artists’ different uses of line and color?

- In Cornelia Parker’s work, do her lines make you think that you are being protected or trapped? How does each idea feel?

- Do different colors represent different places? Can you give an example? Do you have colors that represent your home, country, or place of birth? What are they?
Review and Extension Materials

Assessment

Are students building on each other’s explorations and conversation points?

Can they assimilate their own and the group’s discussion about lines, color, and natural pigments when looking at or making art?

Do they appreciate the collaborative nature of this project?

Have they considered another’s perspective and shown empathy?

Final Assessment and Take-Away Extension

Can students articulate an idea of what sanctuary means to them?

Can they incorporate intentional use of color and line in their artwork?

Are they able to make art that is symbolic of an idea, thought, or feeling?

Read

The Magic Weaver of Rugs: A Tale of the Navajo
by Jerrie Oughton and Lisa Desimini
Curriculum Developed by

a little culture

alittleculture.com