



Art Based Techniques for Dealing with Challenging Times

IF I CREATE FROM THE HEART, NEARLY EVERYTHING WORKS; IF FROM THE HEAD, ALMOST NOTHING. —MARC CHAGALL



Making art can be a powerful tool for helping your students acknowledge and work through difficult emotions. In challenging situations, allowing your students the gift of a safe space and the materials to express themselves may be the greatest gift you can give them.

Setting up a creative safe space

- Make sure that you introduce all the available supplies and show your students how to use them.
- Be clear about your goals, and specific about the type of art you are creating. Don't worry that these guidelines will hinder student creativity. Actually, if you can give the right parameters (e.g.: We've been talking a lot about terrorism and I know that you guys have had a lot of concerns and questions. Today we are going to use a ripped paper exercise to express your feelings when you hear about a terrorist event. Here is how ripped paper art works...), it will allow your students to be even more creative as they react to your prompts.
- Remind students (and yourself) that this art creation is about PROCESS not PRODUCT. This means, we are creating art for the sake of reflection, learning, thinking or healing. We are not looking for the "best" or most "beautiful" art.
- Make a NO COMMENT ZONE: Ask students not to comment on each other's art. Set a rule that no one can say even positive comments about their neighbors' work. This may sound counterintuitive, but the minute you say something positive about one person's art, it may make their neighbor wonder why you didn't say something positive about their art. It also may lead to someone feeling self-conscious, and making negative comments about their own art. No COMMENTS - good or bad - allows the students to focus on their own creating, not on their neighbors.
- Set up your space so that once your students begin, they have access to all materials that they will need, and allow them to move around in ways that are most comfortable for them.
- If your materials are messy, make sure that you have provided table protection or are working in a space that you can easily clean. Don't allow fear of making a mess hinder the creative process.



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Ripped Paper Art



Ripping paper can be a very therapeutic act. With this technique, students can create a piece of abstract art that reflects their feelings at a visceral level.

Supplies:

- Colored construction paper
- White school glue or gluesticks

Process:

- Pass out a sheet of construction paper to each student. They can choose any color they want or you can give everyone the same color for the base. Black or dark colors work really well as the base.
- Provide a variety of papers for ripping. These papers can be other colors of construction paper, magazine paper, newspaper, scrapbook paper or even recycled flyers.
- Instruct students that they will be creating a piece of art based on the topic of conversation, or the event you have been studying. Tell them that the goal of their art is to reflect their FEELINGS based on the topic. They may want to represent, fear, anger, sadness, confusion, etc.
- Show students how they can make art using only ripped paper. Demonstrate how they can create long strips, jagged edges, swirls, shapes, etc. They can also layer their papers on top of each other to create an image. The only rules are that they cannot draw, and they cannot use scissors to create their image. After students are satisfied with their designs, ask them to glue their ripped papers to the base paper.
- Once students are finished, make sure that you give them time to share or reflect on what they have created. This moment of reflection is key in the process. If students don't want to talk or share with the class, they can also write a reflection on a note card or in a journal. It is in the reflection that students really learn and are able to take away lessons or become more aware based on the art that they have created. During reflection time, as during the art creation time, the only person talking about the art is the person who created it. Though you may ask questions (the teacher can say: tell me about your art, or what is the significance of this piece), there should be no judgment based comments, even positive ones.

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T'fillah (prayer) Stones:

Prayer is a powerful tool for helping our students express gratitude and awareness, and to deal with challenging situations. Sometimes it is hard to get into a mindful state, ready to actually pray. Making and using *T'fillah* stones/prayer stones can be a way to help students focus on an idea or intention. This project has two parts. The first is actually creating the prayer stones, and the second is keeping them and using them to help with *kavanah*—intention, when you enter into a prayer space.



Supplies:

- Small, clean flat stones approximately 3 inches long (students can search for them, you can find them, or you can get them pretty cheap at a landscape company)
- Acrylic paint
- Sharpie markers
- Prayer sheets to study or prayer books to explore

Process:

- Choose a prayer that is part of your curriculum, your school worship service, or one that you like. This project works really well when it coincides with what you are already studying, but if you are not sure which prayer to choose, you can choose something from the morning service, like *modeh ani* or *birkot hashachar*, anything that focuses on gratitude works really well.
- Ask students to look at the prayer in English (unless you are confident they can really understand the Hebrew—the teaching of the prayer in Hebrew is not the goal here).
- Ask students to think about what it means.
- Explain that most prayers are about one of a few main ideas: expressions of WOW, expressions of THANKS, or asking for something PLEASE. Ask students how they think prayer can be helpful during difficult times. Ask students to come up with one word that they associate with prayer that can be helpful to focus on during prayer services.
- Pass out a stone to each student, and tell them that we are going to create a prayer stone/*t'fillah* stone that will help us focus on key ideas during prayer.
- Ask students to paint the stone, using the acrylic paint, focusing on their one-word intention.
- When the stones are dry, they can use sharpie markers to write their word on the stone.
- Present the class with a bucket or basket where they can keep the stones. Then, when you enter a prayer space, each student can choose a stone (not necessarily their own) to help them focus.



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Watercolor Emotion Painting



Watercolor paint can be a simple and effective tool for exploring emotions. For this technique it is helpful to know that watercolors will blend together when wet, and therefore knowing which colors to put next to each other and which to keep apart can reduce some frustration. For that purpose, we have provided a sample color wheel. For blending colors, you should pick colors within three spots of the color wheel. Colors that are further apart on the wheel (say red and green), will not blend well, and you will get a muddy result.

Supplies:

- Watercolor trays (I like Prang as they provide a nice rich color)
- Paint brushes and cups or bowls for water
- Watercolor paper or mixed media paper (white construction paper will work in a pinch, but it will absorb more of your color and you will get less vibrant results).
- Colored sharpie markers (optional)

Process:

- Ask students to talk about colors in terms of emotions. What emotion does red make you think of? What about blue? Green? Black? Purple? Ask students to generate ideas – which colors are sad, happy, excited, pensive, depressed, scared?
- Tell students that they will be using watercolor paint to create emotion paintings. You can show them how watercolor can be blended by wetting your paper with your brush, then dipping it in the color tray and then dropping the color on the wet paper. The color will instantly blend and bleed. Adding another color to that one will make your image darker and richer. You can also show them how, when expressing emotions, the way we make our marks can also be significant. You can show them quick, choppy lines, and long fluid ones. Ask them the difference between the two, and what emotions each might represent.
- If you want, you can show students a copy of the color wheel, and explain that colors that are close together on the wheel, (within three sections) will blend very nicely, and that colors further apart will make muddy colors if you try to blend them.
- Provide students with the painting supplies and ask them to create a painting that represents an emotion. You may suggest some to get them thinking: fear, sorrow, anger, frustration, excitement, happiness, love, anxiety.
- When the paintings are done, and completely dry, you may want to provide sharpie markers and allow students a chance to add words to their painting. You can either



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leave this open, or you can suggest that they write one emotion word at the center of their painting.

- Give students a chance to reflect, out loud or in writing, on their painting and what it means. Ask them to describe specifically how they used color and brush stroke to evoke the emotion they chose, and why they chose that emotion.

A Simple Color Wheel:



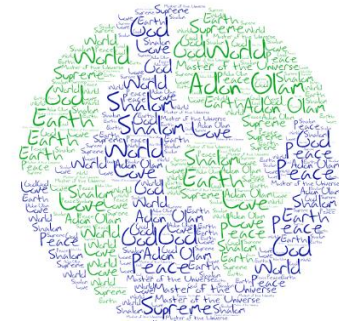
--free use color wheel from

http://www.fiber-images.com/Free_Things/Reference_Charts/free_reference_charts_color_wheel.html



Words can also be poetic, and allowing students to brainstorm their words and feelings related to the tough topic you have been discussing can be beneficial. There are a few word/art programs online that are free and fun to use. All will create a picture out of your words. Some, like Tagul.com will let you choose a specific image to go with your words. If you have the technology available, each student can create their own, or this can be a class exercise, where the teacher creates the word art based on the responses of the students, and projects it from a classroom computer for all to see.

- Computer/Tablet
- Projector (if using only one computer)
- Printer
- Online (free) word/art generator. Choose from wordle.net, tagxedo.com, wordclouds.com, Tagul.com



- Choose a word art generator and take some time before class to see how it works. Each program is slightly different, and while they are not difficult, it may take a minute or two to figure out.
- In class, describe the project to the class. We have been discussing _____, and I want to see how you are all feeling about it. We are going to generate word clouds to help us visualize the emotions we are feeling. If students are using tablets or laptops, help them gain access to the site and allow them to proceed by brainstorming words to use to fill in their cloud. In some programs they can also play with shape, color and font. If you are doing this as a class, you can record their words as they share them. Then the class can discuss details like font, shape, etc.
- Share your word cloud! You can also save it, print it or project it.
- Give students a chance to reflect on their word cloud. Are certain words more prevalent than others? If you did it as a class, did they agree with every word chosen? Why not? What does it tell us about our community that we all learned the same thing and yet had different words or emotional responses to it?