



Landon Peacock, *Metamorphosis*, Oil on wood panel

Landon Peacock
Habitat for Garden Critters
Lesson Theme: Responsible land usage
3rd Grade Art Class
Honey Brook Elementary Center- Twin Valley School District

Across time and cultures human activity has had a profound effect on the habitats of native plants and animals.

Rationale

In my own studio practice I have been exploring land usage as a theme. I did not want to make art representing the terrible damage that has been inflicted upon the land. I decided instead to focus on a positive subject—the abundance of life that is supported by gardens while also questioning an ordinary and ubiquitous land use decision, the lawn. Grass not only consumes an unnecessary amount of water, but is a monoculture. Native plants can be used in its place providing habitat for many animals and pollinators such as bees which have been declining in population. I wanted my artwork to focus on the wonder I feel when I experience all of the incredible plants in a garden and the abundance of life they provide a habitat for. I suspected my artistic explorations of this theme would translate well into a lesson for elementary students. I see this lesson as a window for young student to contemplate the wonder of flourishing ecosystems that can be observed in local gardens. This is a good introduction point because most students have likely been in a garden and can recall firsthand accounts of the abundance of life that gardens support. Creating awareness of the many benefits gardens offer for healthy ecosystems may be a first step for future decisions that contribute to responsible land usage.

Overview

This lesson begins with a group conversation with students gathered closely around my painting, *Metamorphosis*, (shown above). The presence of the original artwork is intended as a **hook** to grab students' attention and interest in the project. This conversation is set up to practice **envisioning** (a studio habit) and is also an **art criticism** exercise. I begin by asking

students what they notice in my painting. Noticing the obvious is the first step in the **art criticism** process. Next, I ask students to close their eyes and **envision** a time that they were in a garden and to think about what they saw. After having an opportunity to share their experiences, I share my own story and tell the class that gardens feel like magical places to me. This sets the conversation up to dive into a more complicated phase of the art criticism process which is making an **interpretation** based on visual evidence. The students are then asked to think about what part of the painting informs them that I was communicating my feelings about gardens being magical. This step requires students to connect visual clues (color choice, mark making, rhythm, composition) to a subjective experience and exercise their **visual thinking strategies**.



After the discussion, a **demonstration** of tracing stencils and safely using pallet knives is done using an overhead camera so the demonstration can be seen in detail on a large screen. The project requires students to first make tracings using stencils of creatures that can be found in a garden. The students have several options to choose from. They are encouraged to consider composition and move the stencil around before they draw it on. The drawings are done on wood planks that have been primed black ahead of time. The black background creates contrast for bright colors to appear extra vibrant especially when thickly applied with a pallet knife. In the demonstration,

students are shown the general rules of using the pallet knife, but are encouraged to **stretch and explore** to discover different effects they can create using the pallet knife. This is done to add choice to their project and add a personal touch to their paintings.

As a **culmination**, and to reinforce interpretive thinking used in the criticism process, students are asked to share results they discovered using the pallet knife and what feelings came from the visual effects. The lights in the back of the room are turned off to create the feeling of a stage in the front so students can have the spotlight while they share.



Standards

Va:Re.7.2.3a Determine messages communicated by an image.

Objectives

- Students will stretch and explore while using a pallet knife to discover new techniques and resulting effects.
- Students will describe how formal decisions can express the experience of being in a garden
- Students will determine messages communicated in an image while interpreting the painting *Metamorphosis*.

Materials

Paint, pallets, pallet knives, primed canvas (with dark background), water cups, paper towels, paint brushes (flat with soft bristles for blending)