



Still Life Drawing

Grades 6-12

Lesson 1: Exploring Composition

Students will learn about different composition strategies and how to use them to plan a still life drawing.

OBJECTIVES

Students will understand:

- Artists can adjust the way they arrange objects in a still life to create different compositions.
- Artists often plan their compositions using thumbnail sketches.

Students will be able to:

- Create a series of thumbnail sketches of different still life compositions to select from for a final drawing.

ART MAKING

Materials and tools needed:

- Pencil
- Paper
- Eraser (kneaded & vinyl or gum)
- 3 different objects, ideally of different sizes and forms
- Templates made of paper, cardstock, or cardboard

Material Prep:

Make a rectangular template for each student to trace to keep their thumbnail sketches consistent. The ratio of the thumbnail template should be consistent with the ratio of the paper size you plan to use for the final drawing. For example, if the final drawing will be 12 x 9", make 4 x 3" templates. If the final drawing will be 18 x 12", make 3 x 2" templates.

Note: The following steps are written with sample language you may use with your students as you go through the lesson. Scripted language is italicized.

Engagement

Introduce:

*A **still life** is an artwork depicting an arrangement of objects. Object selection in a still life is important as it can tell the viewer about who the artist is or about their interests.*

When we choose objects for a still life, we can select objects with personal value, as well as for a variety of different sizes, shapes, and textures.

***Composition** is the way a picture is organized. There are different compositional strategies that artists can use to make their still artworks more interesting. These strategies create dynamic, interesting compositions that draw the viewer's eye across the page.*

Introduce compositional strategies on [student slides 5 - 8](#).

- **Rule of Thirds:** Dividing the page into thirds, both vertically and horizontally, and placing the focal areas at the meeting points.
- **Triangular Composition:** Arranging objects to create a triangular shape.
- **Diagonal Composition:** Arranging objects with a strong diagonal direction.
- **Central Composition:** Arranging objects in the center of the page.

Demonstrate Measuring Objects:

***Proportion** is the relative size relationship between different parts of a whole.*

Demonstrate how to use one object as a measurement tool to develop correct **proportions** throughout the rest of the still life.

For example, using the apple as the unit of measurement, we can see that the height of the apple is about the size of the width of the cup.

Demonstrate Drawing Thumbnail Sketches:

A thumbnail sketch is a small, simplified drawing made quickly without corrections. Artists often use thumbnail sketches to plan the compositions of larger drawings.

Use a template to draw thumbnail rectangles, then demonstrate making sketches of two different compositions, one horizontal and one vertical. Demonstrate using the pencil as a measuring tool for relative proportions. Explain that thumbnail sketches are meant to be small, simplified versions of their final drawing.

Work Time

Make four thumbnail sketches on a piece of paper.

- Have students use templates and experiment with different arrangements and compositional strategies with their objects.
- Encourage them to experiment with both vertical and horizontal arrangements before settling on one that works best with the composition.
- Remind students that thumbnail sketches are meant to be small, simplified versions of their final drawing.

Reflection Questions for Discussion

- *What is one compositional strategy that you explored today?*
- *How did this strategy create an interesting composition?*
- *How did you choose your still life objects?*

VOCABULARY

Still Life: an artwork depicting an arrangement of objects

Composition: the way a picture is organized

Thumbnail Sketch: a small, simplified drawing made quickly without corrections.

Proportion: relative size relationship between different parts