

In the Style Of - Mary Cassatt

After learning about Mary Cassatt and her pastel drawings, the children use colored chalk to depict a close relationship between two people. For all ages. Plan 1 to 2 sessions.

KEY IDEAS

- Learning about Mary Cassatt and her pastel drawings
- Working in the style of Mary Cassatt using colored chalk
- Learning ways to depict relationships in art

LANGUAGE

realistic, sketchy, background, relationship

RESOURCES

Click [here](#) for more information about Mary Cassatt. Click [here](#) for five examples of Mary Cassatt's pastels. I also include these two [oil paintings](#) to show fathers with their children and relationships between two friends.

BACKGROUND

The Life of Mary Cassatt

Mary Cassatt is best known for her portraits of mothers and children. Using paints, pastels, and printmaking, she depicts the close relationships between two people through an embrace, eye contact, holding hands, or simply sharing an activity.

She was born in 1844 in Pennsylvania. As the daughter of a successful banker, she grew up privileged and cultivated. Her father was delighted with her painting talents and sent her to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. It was considered appropriate and refined for a woman to learn to paint and to use this talent at home, but when she decided to paint professionally, her father became distressed.

When she turned 21, Mary Cassatt chose career over marriage and left to study in Europe against her father's wishes. She became friends with Edward Degas who was part of a new and controversial art movement in Paris called Impressionism. Degas had a strong influence on her work and she eventually exhibited her paintings along with other Impressionists in Paris.

Like Degas, she often used pastels because of their freshness and spontaneity. Her artwork mostly depicts the relationships between women and children, portrayed up close and physically interacting. To emphasize her subjects, she took special care to draw their faces and hands in a realistic manner, while their clothing, as well as the backgrounds, were rendered sketchily with less detail.

At the age of 56, her eyesight began to fail from diabetes, and by 70 she was forced to stop working on her art. She died in 1926 in Paris.

YOU WILL NEED

- Drawing pencils
- Colored drawing chalk of good quality
- 9- by 12-inch construction paper—brown or gray will bring out the lighter colors of chalk
- Scrap paper

- Paper towels
- Newspaper pads
- Examples of Mary Cassatt's work
- Spray fixative

THE PROJECT

Preparation

- Become familiar with the life and work of Mary Cassatt.
- Gather examples of her work.
- Set out pencils, construction paper, colored chalk, newspaper pads, scrap paper, and paper towels.

How to Begin

- Display as many examples of Cassatt's work as possible. As the children look closely, tell them about her life and her work. Tell the children that they will be making drawings using the style of Mary Cassatt.
- Explain that their drawings should depict a *relationship*, or special feeling, between an adult and a child or between two friends. Discuss some ways to show affection, such as holding hands, placing an arm around a shoulder, eye contact, or sharing an activity. Have some of the children demonstrate how arms appear when wrapped around a friend's shoulders or holding a baby.
- Discuss how Mary Cassatt made people the most important part of her pictures by drawing their faces and hands as *realistically*, or real, as possible, while drawing the rest of the figures and the *background*, or areas farthest from the viewer, in a looser, *sketchier* manner..
- Show the children how to work with colored chalk, explaining that it is very similar to the pastels Mary Cassatt used. To make the chalk easier to apply, the children should place their papers on pads of newspaper. Explain that the chalk should be applied with a gentle firmness to get the brightest colors. Demonstrate how to blend colors by laying one color on top of another. Discourage rubbing the colors together, explaining that the Impressionists let our eyes do the blending.
- Show the children that they can add small details directly on top of a layer of colored chalk. For example, they should fill in the face color first, and then add the eyes, nose, and mouth directly on top of the skin color.
- Tell the children, when adding their details, to rest their hands on a piece of scrap paper to avoid lifting the already applied chalk from their pictures. Have paper towels available for the children to keep their chalk clean.
- Chalk dust will form as the chalk is applied. Warn the children not to brush it away because it will smear. Instead, they should gently blow it away or carefully shake their papers upside down.
- Give the children pencils and paper and have them lightly sketch the basic outline of two figures sharing a relationship.
- Have the children apply the colored chalk to their drawings, reminding them to rest their hands on scrap paper while working over already applied chalk and to gently blow away the chalk dust.

Note: Have an adult spray the completed drawings with spray fixative in a well ventilated area.

NOTES

- Some pastels contain pigments not suitable for children and all are relatively expensive. A good quality colored drawing chalk works well.
- Chalk will occasionally have a hard spot rendering it unusable. When this happens,

break off the tip of the chalk and try again.

- It's helpful to demonstrate to the children how the chalk will smear if it is brushed away. Encourage them to gently blow it away.
- Light smudges of chalk dust can usually be erased with a plastic eraser.

LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR WORK

- What relationship or feeling do you see in each picture?
- What information did the artists use to show us these relationships?
- Discuss how the artists emphasized the people in their pictures.

What the children might say...

- *The chalk is covering up all of my pencil lines.*
- *Oh no! I forgot to blow the chalk away!*
- *My hands are leaving marks all over my picture.*
- *This orange chalk is leaving blue marks where I don't want them.*
- *Yikes! My chalk broke.*
- *This yellow chalk won't work no matter how hard I push and it's making streaks on my paper.*

What you might say...

- *You can redraw your details directly on top of your first layer of chalk.*
- *If you accidentally brushed away your chalk dust, try applying another layer of chalk over the area that smeared. I can help you erase some of the lighter parts of the smear with a plastic eraser.*
- *Remember to rest your hand on the scrap paper when applying your details.*
- *Be sure to use a paper towel to wipe any chalk dust from your chalk before you use it.*
- *If your chalk breaks, don't worry about it. Small pieces are often easier to use.*
- *Sometimes chalk has a hard spot in it and won't work well. It can be fixed by breaking off a little piece. Let me help you.*