Drawing from Observation Assignment by Liana Graham

The following lesson is for my Visual Arts students, grades 9-12, all have been identified as gifted in the Visual Arts. The introduction to the assignment and pre-assessment will take 1 class, 2 class studio work days with objects from the list available to draw, and 2-3 classes for critique, depending on number of students. Allow for in-depth critique. (classes are 1 hour)

Pre-Assessment: Students will choose an object from our Nature Lab, a collection of rocks, shells, bones, plants, and insects. They will complete a one-minute blind contour drawing, a one-minute contour drawing, and a ten-minute drawing in their sketchbooks. These drawings will be checked by the instructor to assess readiness and ability.

Content: Drawing from observation is an important skill that will help your artistic growth, no matter what form of art you enjoy creating. It is similar to an athlete’s training. A professional basketball player may have to lift weights to build strength, even though that is not part of the actual game.

Process: Please choose 10 objects from the list below. Draw them as you see them. These sketches don’t have to be completely rendered drawings with value. Sketchbook studies with contour lines are acceptable.

1. a plant
2. a chair
3. your unmade bed
4. a coffee cup
5. a stuffed toy
6. a friend
7. clothespins
8. paperclips
9. a sponge
10. a towel
11. a couch
12. a tree
13. an animal
14. hands
15. feet
16. your mailbox
17. a bicycle
18. your favorite food
19. books
20. your toothbrush

After completing the 10 sketches in your sketchbook, choose three drawings that you consider are your strongest.

Students will be arranged in groups of 4 using the grouping techniques from Kristina Doubet’s workshop on Instructional Grouping and Management. Grouping will be based on interest and student choice. Inventory charts (Collins, 2016) will be posted around the room. Students will place a sticker on each chart indicating if they drew that item (listed above). The instructor will assess which objects had the most responses, and which had the least. Using the inventory charts, the students will be asked which object was their favorite to draw. This does not have to be their best drawing. They will be split into groups of 4 based on their favorite objects to draw. Then they are asked to share their three strongest drawings with their group members and critique. They discuss what is working in the sketches and areas for improvement. Each student will have rubrics to give feedback to peers about their drawings. They will circle the appropriate scores and discuss their reasons. After group discussions, each student will select one drawing to study further.

Product: They will render a finished drawing on a 18” x 24” sheet of drawing paper. On the due date, students will hang their work up for class critique. When they present their work, they will discuss the areas they feel are successful and the areas that gave them the biggest challenges. Their peers and instructor will contribute to the critique by providing positive feedback and constructive criticism on their artwork.

Rubric:

A finished drawing

emerging- students are struggling with drawing skills and observation skills

proficient- students demonstrate average drawing skills, some understanding of drawing from observation

advanced- students demonstrate advanced drawing skills, accurate observation skills

Composition

emerging- Composition is not considered, drawing is in center of page, floating

proficient- Composition is considered, but not creative

advanced- Interesting composition

Break 3 borders

emerging- Breaks none or 1 border

proficient- Breaks 2 borders

advanced- Breaks 3 or 4 borders

Creative use of negative space

emerging- Negative space is undefined and floating around subject

proficient- Some negative space/shape is made

advanced- Composition is creating interesting shapes of negative space

Mark-making

emerging- Used only in the subject or background as design element

proficient- Used in both subject and background as design element and value study

advanced- Used in subject and background to demonstrate understanding of value, volume, and textures

Craftsmanship

emerging- work looks dirty, wrinkled, or torn

proficient- work is neat and clean

advanced- work is presentation-ready with matting and wired to hang

Class Critique

emerging- Does not participate in class critique or is overtly negative to others

proficient- Participates when asked, some positive feedback/constructive criticism

advanced- Critique participation is thoughtful and unsolicited, willingly contributes both

positive feedback and constructive criticism

References

Collins, G. (June 28, 2016). Content, Process and Product Differentiation workshop. Content Teaching Academy at JMU.

Doubet, K. (June 27, 2016). Instructional Grouping and Management workshop. Content Teaching Academy at JMU.