

Renee the Painting Elephant
NewsDepth, January 8, 2009
Classroom Activities



Overview:

Elephants can paint! Really! They love to paint, and Renee, the Toledo Zoo's thirty one year old pachyderm is no exception. In fact, she is huge in the art world, and visitors to the zoo this weekend can see her in action. Renee's paintings will be raffled off to benefit elephant conservation efforts at the zoo. Students in the activities today will learn more about elephants and their "talented trunks".

<http://www.elephantstay.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&id=5378990> (source for photograph)

Grade Level: Grade 4

Subjects: Language Arts, Visual Art

Standards:

Language Arts: Students will be able to produce informal writing for various purposes. Students will be able to read and recall information. Students will be able to read and summarize main ideas.

Classroom Activities:

1. **Activity #1** "Those Talented Trunks" (20-30 minutes)
 - Discussion:
 - Have any of you ever seen a live elephant? At the zoo, perhaps, or at a circus? Have you ever seen an elephant display any particular talent or perform any kind of trick? What was that? How do you think it was trained to perform that feat?
 - Supposedly elephants have incredible memories. They say, "An elephant never forgets." How do you think people have come to that conclusion? What could an elephant possibly do to display a remarkable memory?
 - In the NewsDepth feature this week, you saw Renee, the pachyderm at the Toledo Zoo display a remarkable talent. What was it? Do you think she realizes that she is an artist? There are some who believe that elephants are simply shown how to make a brush stroke to create a piece of art, and that they just merely remember, through rote training, how to recreate the strokes. Others are convinced that elephants are capable of self initiated artistic expression. What do you think? Regardless of how or why they paint, the intelligence required to receive such precise painting training is still astounding.

- Watch those “talented trunks in action”
 - Here as an additional video of an elephant touting his talented trunk. This is Paya, an elephant from Thailand who is the only elephant who has been trained to do a self portrait.

<http://www.snopes.com/photos/animals/elephantpainting.asp> (Picture of Paya comes from this site)



- Painting like Elephants: Provide students with a paint brush, paper, and some paint. Ask them to put their hands together in the “praying hands position” and have them hold a paintbrush at the ends of their fingers. Have them then cup their thumbs over their noses and then paint a self portrait. They cannot move their arms, only their noses. See what they can paint.
- Another website featuring Paya and self portrait: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/5203120.stm

2. **Activity #2** “Elephants, Asia’s Starving Artists” (15-20 minutes)

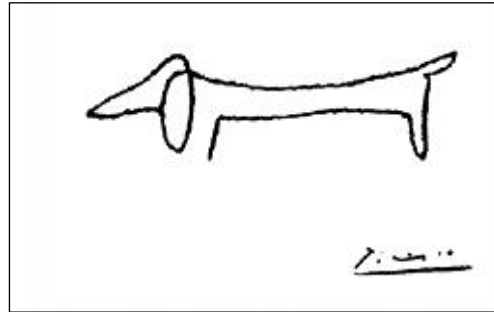
- Visit <http://www.elephantart.com/catalog/splash.php> , which is the home page for the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project. This website explains the background behind elephants being taught to paint, with the resulting artworks being sold and the monies raised being used for elephant conservation projects.
- Included in the website is an extensive gallery of Elephant Art. Have the students choose one piece of art from the gallery and assign a title to the painting. Have them show the class the piece of art they have chosen and explain why they chose their title.
- A more extensive article from National Geographic about Elephant art is <http://www.novica.com/news/index.cfm?articleid=83>

3. **Activity #3** “Elephant Artist, Reading to Learn”

- This is a reading lesson: “The key to this lesson is to be able to read an article and recall information from the article. This article introduces new terms to students, and it is informative as well. Students will be able to recall information from the article in this lesson. This lesson will also include reading silently, playing a game by asking each other questions, and finding out answers individually.”
http://www.auburn.edu/academic/education/reading_genie/chall/eversrl.html
- The “Ranger Rick” article that is referenced in the lesson: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EPG/is_11_35/ai_78930559/pg_1?tag=artBody;col1

4. Activity #4 “Abstract Elephants?”

- Show the students these two pictures:



Ask them if they can identify the artists.

The artist on the left is eight year old Hong, the elephant, from Thailand.

The artist on the right is Pablo Picasso. Follow with a discussion.

- Ask your students if they know what “Abstract Art” is. Ask them if they have ever been to a Museum and looked at Abstract art. Explain that the greater part of abstract paintings is the product of the painter's imagination, of what he thinks and feels, rather than using nature as a model. Abstract painters try to tell us something about their inner self.
- Look at one of these for some samples of abstract art:
http://www.osnatfineart.com/ABSTRACT_Gallery_0.jsp
<http://paintings.name/>
- Then go to the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project site:
<http://www.elephantart.com/catalog/default.php?cPath=69>
- Ask students to choose what they consider to be an “abstract elephant painting.” Then tell them to write one paragraph from the point of view of the elephant describing what the elephant was thinking about when he painted it. What was he feeling or trying to express or tell us?

Additional Resources

http://www.toledozoo.org/events/elephant_painting_raffle.htm The Toledo Zoo's website with additional information about Renee

<http://www.imam.org/Wier%20Education/New%20pdf%20files/AWierLessonplanKumar-Melamidwebready.pdf> A lesson plan about two Russian Artists who started an art school for elephants. Additional information about the plight of the elephants and how their art is helping them survive.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtxWWfPowKU> Lots more videos of elephants painting.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtxWWfPowKU> Another elephant art gallery.