

School Arts

Inspiring Creativity in Teaching
November 2000 \$4.00



DAVIS

Soft Boundaries

Pixellated Puppetry

William Grabowski

Technology presents challenges for us all, be it at home, the workplace, or in school. We, as educators, struggle to find those areas where the computer will enhance learning rather than exist as an expensive prop. Used as a tool to facilitate research, improve writing and editing, and problem solve, computers are increasingly being used by classroom teachers to help provide skills their students need and the workplace demands. Art educators need not be left out of this loop. Innovative technologies, even at the elementary level, can have a place in the art curriculum. Never taking the place of pencil, clay, or paint, the computer, nonetheless, should be another vehicle for creation. The workplace now demands a digital literacy, which we as educators need to address. Many art careers, especially the graphics field, now include a technology piece. National and state standards are including technology as a requirement. That being said, I personally was reluctant and slow to hop on board the technology train.

A colleague sparked an idea which led me to re-tool my unit on drawing. One of the ways I have taught drawing skills is through a three-step sequence in which I have first, third, and fifth graders view, read, or discuss selections from the *Nutcracker Suite* by Tchaikovsky. Students then designed their own Nutcracker on paper after reviewing concepts learned in previous years (building from shapes, rendering

3-D, etc.) and building upon new concepts introduced the current year (caricaturing, costume design, etc.). Wherever possible, I tried to link the visual arts to another discipline—in this case music and the performing arts. This year I decided to have my fifth graders use the

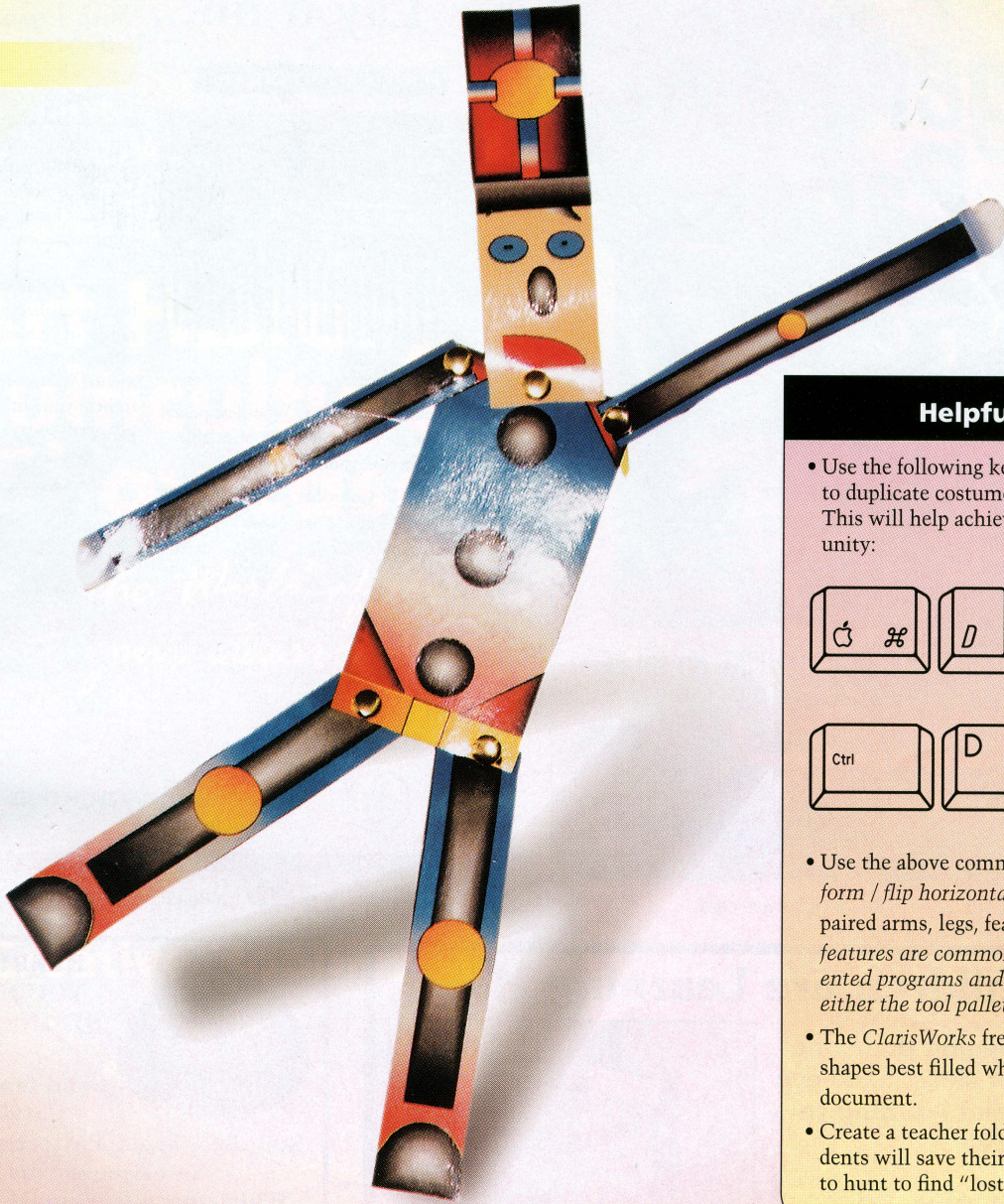
I told my students that the figures could be of either gender, and the costuming traditional or fantastical as desired. Details and enhancements were encouraged. Principles such as repetition, texture and unity were stressed.



Bulletin Board display, grade five.

computer to create a Nutcracker puppet with movable body parts. I wanted the puppets to be a decent size, approximately 12" (30.5 cm) tall, so one of our computer lab teachers created a two-page body template of separate arms, legs, head, and body which the students used to get started. They were then free to alter sizes if desired. We spoke of Near and Far Eastern shadow puppetry as a jumping-off point, followed by concepts of costume design.

ClarisWorks was the program of choice, but virtually any object-oriented drawing program would do. We used both Drawing and Painting documents, as each has its pros and cons. Basically, *drawings* consisted of objects arranged as a collage, whereas *paintings* were more like pointillism—individual pixels of color as opposed to shapes. We experimented to figure out which document style best suited our needs. Also, we found it best for efficiency purposes to limit the



Kamalakar Aturi, grade five.

students' choices when it came to the tool bar. Some tools are tricky and take time to master.

Our project consisted of three 45-minute periods in our school's Computer Lab, with each child at a station. After we printed, I laminated the work for durability before the students cut out and assembled the puppets with half-inch brass fasteners.

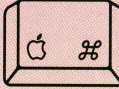
Our district, like many others, is reviewing the guidelines set in the Standards for the Arts. This project addresses and satisfies the directive


to add an "electronic media" component to the art curriculum.

Student enthusiasm was at an all-time high for this project as there was always an eager crowd around the printer waiting for the results. In years to come, I hope to see our Nutcrackers evolve into different forms. Perhaps a 3-D figure created by rolling and gluing the flat body forms, or a transformer action figure. More creative options can only help our students to better express and explore their potentials. ▲

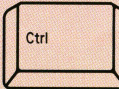
Helpful Hints


- Use the following keyboard combinations to duplicate costume design elements. This will help achieve a sense of overall unity:





MAC





PC

- Use the above commands plus the *transform / flip horizontally, option*, to create paired arms, legs, features, etc. (These features are common to most image oriented programs and can be found in either the tool palette or the menu bar.)
- The *ClarisWorks* freehand tool creates shapes best filled when used in a *painting* document.
- Create a teacher folder in which the students will save their work (we often had to hunt to find "lost" work).

William Grabowski is an elementary art specialist at Center Street Elementary School in Williston Park, New York. Frank DeCelle, a computer lab teacher, advised on the project.

NATIONAL STANDARD

Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.