

school arts

Renewal

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DAVIS

Henna

Hand to Hand

William Grabowski

Art forms grow and flourish throughout our world. They allow us to understand and celebrate the richness that different cultures have to offer. We are doing well when we present this richness to our students and prompt them to create.

Nontraditional Art Forms

Recently, I introduced my students to the art form of henna, also referred to as mehndi. Unlike traditional Western methods of creating with

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pencil or paint on canvas, mehndi is art applied as decoration to the body. Using a paste created from the leaves of the henna plant, mehndi designs are drawn on the body, most often on the hands and feet, as a ceremonial art form for festive occasions, such as weddings and other joyous events.



The Art of Henna

The art of henna has been practiced for more than five-thousand years in Pakistan, India, Africa, and the Middle East. It still flourishes in India, Pakistan, and surrounding countries, as well as in the United States, where knowledge of the tradition has grown. As body art is a personal and often family choice, we chose to creatively reinvent this design and decorative art by creating a student art project using special pens uniquely applied on a variety of colored papers.

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beautiful line and pattern decorations while employing traditional mehndi themes. Through research, students discovered that organic shapes are often featured in mehndi, particularly flowers, vines, birds, fish, and celestial objects.

Choosing and Tracing

Students chose from black, brown, violet, tan, or yellow construction paper to use for their backgrounds. I asked them to trace their hands and arms lightly in pencil across the paper to create a strong composition. Next, within their traced hands and

arms, they began to create patterns in pencil, celebrating organic shapes and patterns.


Marker-Pen Problems

Students used colored pens to trace over their designs, choosing from thin brown or permanent metallic gold and silver markers. The metallic markers, not surprisingly, became the class favorites. These metallic markers are excellent, but can pose some challenges. They do not dry instantly when applied, so care must be taken by students to not drag their hands over lines they've just created. Working from top to bottom helps students to steer clear of this problem. Another

issue is the occasional "blob" that results from pressing too hard or remaining in one spot too long. As a workaround, I suggested that students "re-design" the blob by turning it into a small design, then repeating it in similar places in the drawing.

Inspiration from Tradition

Students' joy in creating these works of art was infectious. My fifth-graders were up to the task and created many memorable works that celebrated the studied tradition of henna and mehndi. Parents and administrators were pleased to see the finished presentations, and were glad that students explored and cre-

ated art pieces that developed from their examination of this cultural tradition found across the world. 

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

WEB LINK

hennaartconnection.com/history-of-henna

www.schoolartsdigital.com/i/146798-apr-2011/31

