




Unity and Focal Point in Collage

Objective

To practice using the principles of unity and focal point while experimenting with collage.

Supplies

- ✓ examples of paintings to show unity and focal point (Painting References follow, page 184)
- ✓ posterboard, foamboard, or cardstock, various solid colors: 12" x 12"
- ✓ items for collage: beads, buttons, construction paper scraps, dried leaves or other natural objects, fabric scraps, feathers, magazines, newspapers, scrapbook paper, seeds, tissue paper scraps, uncooked pasta shapes, yarn, and the like.
- ✓ scissors
- ✓ glue

 **Time Tip:** *It may be helpful to begin the project with provided materials in one session, but finish in another session when students have been able to collect more items from their home or yard.*

Vocabulary

collage (pronounced ko-LAZSH)

focal point

unity

Introduction

A collage is a piece of artwork made by arranging and gluing flat pieces of paper or fabric, or other small objects onto a flat background. A great variety of materials can be used for collage. But this can cause a problem. With so many possibilities, a collage can easily become too busy and have too much variety. Artwork needs to have unity as well as variety so that everything in a piece of artwork seems to belong together. Limiting the colors, shapes, or theme of a collage can help. Repeating some of the colors and other elements in a collage can also help.

For example, if everything in a collage is in some shade of red, this element of color will keep the collage unified. If the collage has one specific theme like leaves or lions,

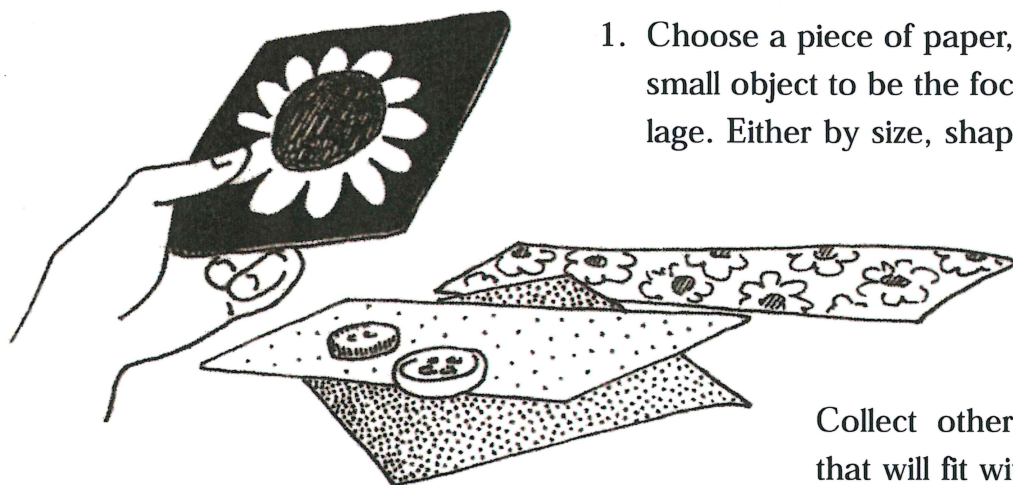
this can also help to give it unity. Using the same kind of paper or object in more than one place will help as well.

Unity is a very important principle of design, but so is focal point. There must also be a purpose to the unity. We can all work in unity together as a class, but what is the goal of our working together? That's the focal point. Our artwork needs to be working together and belonging together, too, but it also needs a goal, or a focal point. Our design needs something to which our eyes can be led, something that stands out as most important.

Teacher: *Display examples of paintings to demonstrate how artists have used both unity and focal point in their compositions. Painting References follow.*

Your task is to make a collage that clearly shows the principle of unity and the principle of focal point. Choose one main object to stand out as the focal point of your design. Then choose other objects to arrange around that one, being careful to keep your design unified. To keep the focal point from leading our eye off the collage, make sure your focal point is placed somewhere near the center of the 12" x 12" background, though not exactly on center and not too close to the edge.

Directions

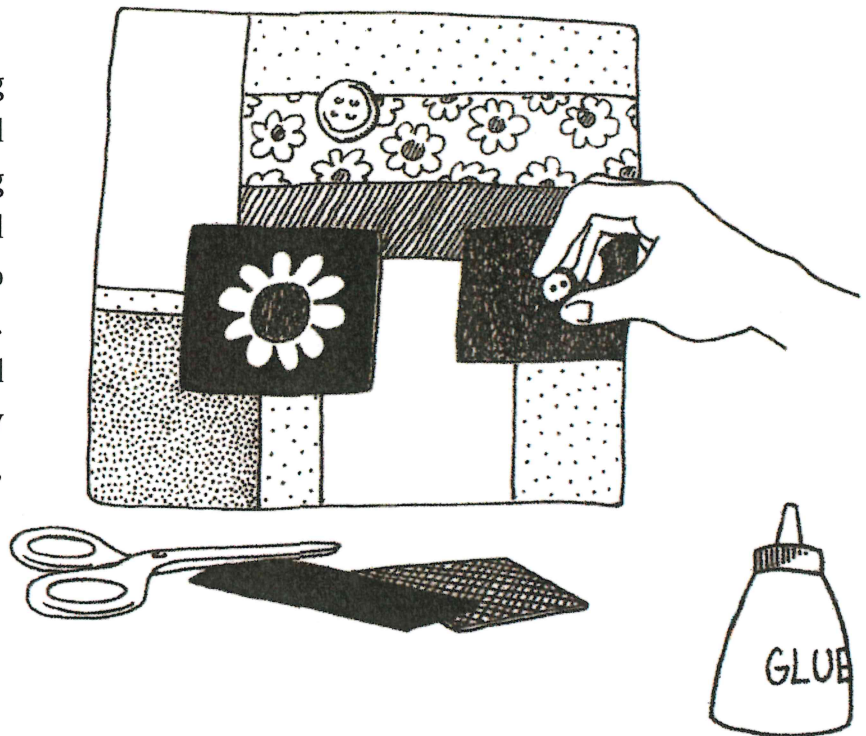


1. Choose a piece of paper, fabric, picture, or a small object to be the focal point of your collage. Either by size, shape, color, or in some other way, this element should stand out the most in your composition.

Collect other objects or papers that will fit with the focal point of your collage.

2. Arrange all your papers and objects on the 12" by 12" base. Carefully consider the placement of your focal point and how all of the other elements in your collage must fit together in unity with that focal point. Papers can be cut or torn to desired

sizes and shapes. Using only random curves and organic shapes, or using only straight edges and geometric shapes, can also help to unify your collage. If your arrangement is still too busy, simplify it by repeating more elements, taking some elements out, or replacing some elements with plain paper.



3. When you are satisfied with your arrangement, glue everything down securely.
4. Look at your collage. How does your collage show the principle of unity? Does a focal point clearly stand out in your arrangement?

Variations

- One or more themes may be assigned to a whole class, allowing the collection of collage elements to be more focused. Some examples for themes include autumn, winter, trees, architecture, certain colors (red or blue), certain animals (dogs or cats), certain shapes (squares or circles).
- A square background is assigned in the lesson above to give students experience in composing a design within another shape besides rectangular, but a collage can be made smaller or larger, depending on available materials and time.
- Make a poster of collected photographs from scenic magazines or calendars. Arrange and glue the pictures on a large piece of paper or posterboard and label them according to what principle of design each one most clearly shows: unity, variety, or focal point. Find at least one photo for each principle. Be prepared to explain how each picture illustrates the principle with which it is labeled.

Painting References

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt (1647) by Rembrandt van Rijn.

The figures in this painting are small and barely visible, but what stands out as an exceptionally noticeable focal point is the campfire against the moonlit night. The dark shadows and other dark areas—typical of Rembrandt’s paintings—give the artwork a strong sense of compositional unity. It all fits and belongs as one, because it’s all dark and belongs to the night.

Young Woman Reading a Letter (c. 1665) by Jan Vermeer.

See how Vermeer used geometric shapes to compose this painting and to unify it. The square edges of the map, the chairs, and the resulting rectangular spaces on the wall all surround the woman reading the letter. Our eyes are thus led to her as the focal point of the composition, where her reading is the only action taking place in the painting. Vermeer’s use of subdued, earthy colors throughout the painting also gives the composition unity, while the contrast of lights and darks lends plenty of variety.

Five O’Clock Tea (1880) by Mary Cassatt.

The repeated grays and rusts of the composition tie almost everything together in this picture into a unified whole. The greatest contrast is the white teacup from which the woman on the right is drinking. It is positioned near the center of the painting, and it’s near her black dress for even more contrast. It is clearly the focal point, and indeed tells us what the picture is about—it’s time for tea!

Notes