



Teacher:

Class: 2nd grade

Duration: 2–3 class periods

Course Unit:

Lesson Title: William Edmondson–Inspired Soap Carvings

LESSON OVERVIEW

William Edmondson (1874–1951) was a self-taught American sculptor who became widely recognized for the sculptures of animals and human figures he created out of limestone. Students will explore a subtractive method of carving and develop a basic understanding of some techniques, tools, and carving materials. Students will consider Edmondson’s subject matter and use of positive and negative space, and then employ their newly discovered carving skills to create Edmondson-inspired animal sculptures from soap.

STANDARDS

Tennessee State Standards

Visual Art—Grade 2

- 1.1 Use tools and media consistently in a safe and responsible manner.
- 1.2 Demonstrate an understanding of a variety of techniques.
- 1.3 Explore a variety of processes.
- 1.4 Recognize and demonstrate levels of craftsmanship.
- 2.1 Identify, understand, and apply the elements of art.
- 3.1 Select subject matter, symbols, and ideas for the student’s own art.
- 3.2 Analyze subject matter, symbols, and ideas in the student’s own art.
- 3.3 Analyze subject matter, symbols, and ideas in others’ art.
- 5.1 Analyze the characteristics and merits of the student’s own work.
- 5.2 Analyze the characteristics and merits of others’ work.

Science—Grade 2

- GLE 0207.Inq.1 Observe the world of familiar objects using the senses and tools.
- GLE 0207.T/E.2 Apply engineering design and creative thinking to solve practical problems.
- GLE 0207.9.1 Use tools to observe the physical properties of objects.
- GLE 0207.9.3 Recognize that air takes up space.

Common Core Connections for Integrated Subjects—Language Arts, Speaking & Listening

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1a Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1b Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.8 Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to recognize the characteristics of William Edmondson's sculptures.
2. Students will be able to explain the term *subtractive* as it is applied to the sculptural process.
3. Students will be able to define positive and negative space.
4. Students will be able to demonstrate control over sculptural tools.

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION

1. The teacher will walk around the room to observe the students' work habits during the activity and note how well they follow instructions.
2. The students will participate in a class critique in which they compare the characteristics of their completed soap sculptures with the style of William Edmondson.
3. The students will provide written explanations of the subtractive carving method through definitions and diagrams.

MATERIALS

Note: for this activity, use a non-moisturizing brand of soap, such as Ivory[®].

Per classroom:

- A PC-to-projector connection
- 1 premade example of a soap carving
- 1 shoebox, with 4 examples of soap in different stages of sculpture (see Activating Strategy, Step 5)
- 1 five-gallon bucket
- 1 large garbage bag

Per workstation:

- Newspaper and masking tape
- 1 small bucket
- 1 spoon
- 1 butter knife
- 1 set of clay tools

Per student:

- 1 apron
- 1 black marker
- 1 travel-size bar of soap
- 1 small damp sponge
- 1 full-size bar of soap
- 1 small art journal/sketchbook *or* 2 sheets of paper
- 1 pencil

ACTIVATING STRATEGY

1. Show the class the “[Exploring Sculpture](#)” episode of [ArtQuest: Art Is All Around You](#).
2. Ask students what the word *subtraction* means. Then, explain the subtractive method of sculpting, defining it as a method of sculpting a three-dimensional form by removing or taking away material from the original material.
3. Using images of Edmondson’s four-legged animal sculptures, point out which features make each animal unique and which features make them similar. Define 2 kinds of space: *positive space* (the space occupied by an element, object, or form) and *negative space* (the empty space or air around an element, object, or form). Explain how the shape of the positive space determines the shape of the negative space.
4. Show a premade example and ask the students how they might think it was made from a bar of soap.
5. Pass around a shoebox containing the following:
 - a plain bar of soap
 - a bar of soap with dotted lines drawn on it, with areas to be removed labeled as “negative space,” and the other areas labeled as “positive space”
 - a bar of soap with the areas to be removed colored in with black marker
 - an example of a completed carving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Prior to class, set up workstations as follows:
 - a. Determine the number of workstations needed, with 3–5 students per station.
 - b. Using newspaper and masking tape, cover working surfaces.
 - c. At each station, place a small bucket, a spoon, a butter knife, and 1 set of clay tools.
 - d. Add the following items per student: 1 apron, 1 marker, 1 travel-size soap bar, and 1 sponge. (You will hand out the regular-size bars later.)
2. At the start of the activity, have students go to their workstations and put on aprons.
3. Demonstrate how to draw guidelines for the negative space and positive space on the soap. Have students draw similar guidelines on their soap.
4. Demonstrate how to use carving tools on the soap: first with a spoon, then with a butter knife, and then with clay tools. Smooth the edges using a damp sponge.
5. Move around the room to direct the students as they experiment with the carving tools:
 - a. Using each tool in turn, students will aggressively carve a section of the negative space from the soap.
 - b. Again trying out each tool, students will gently carve the rest of the negative space from the soap.
 - c. Students will then practice smoothing some areas with damp sponges.
6. Ask the class to compare what happens when carving gently vs. carving aggressively and how the difference can affect craftsmanship. Tell students to gather up the soap scraps and place them in the bucket. As they do so, invite them to share the problems they may have encountered while using the tools.
7. Pass out a full-size bar of soap to each student.
8. Demonstrate how to place lines on the soap for a generic four-legged animal’s head, legs, and tail. Have students draw similar lines on their bars of soap and color in the negative spaces with their black markers.
9. Tell students to use the clay tools, butter knives, and spoons to carve away the negative spaces. As they do so, walk around the class and assist students who may be having trouble. One way of providing help is to ask the student if they can find their animal’s legs, head, and tail. Broken animals can still be made into something wonderful!
10. When all the students have completed a generic animal shape, ask them to look at their carvings and consider the next step. Some prompts:
 - a. Many animals have this shape. What four-legged animals could these be?
 - b. What animals did William Edmondson create out of a similar shape? (A bear, a dog, a wolf, a cat, a lion, a tiger, an ape, etc.)
 - c. Which animal do you want your carving to become?

- d. What are the characteristics that make your animal unique? Does it have a mane? big ears? a big snout? a bushy tail? a furry body?
11. Choose 3–4 students to briefly explain how they might use the carving tools to make their sculpture look like the animal they have chosen.
 12. Tell students to use their markers to draw in guidelines on the positive space of their sculptures, indicating what needs to be carved into negative space. As before, walk around the class to assess progress, provide positive feedback and affirmation, and assist students who may be having trouble.
 13. Have students use the clay carving tools to carve away the negative space from their sculptures, starting with the largest areas, working down to the details, and using sponges to smooth the soap when they are done.
 14. To clean up:
 - a. Each student will put all their soap scraps into the small bucket at their workstation. One student per group will empty that bucket into the large five-gallon bucket (ideally positioned near a sink, with the goal of recycling or reusing the soap).
 - b. One student will gather the tools and sponges from the workstation and place them in the sink for the teacher to wash.
 - c. The students at each station will roll up the newspaper and tape into a tight ball and place it into the large garbage bag. Students will then hang up their aprons.

ALTERNATE/EXTRA ACTIVITIES

- Procure a small piece of limestone (or other type of stone) and a chisel and mallet for students to experience the difficulty of carving in stone.
- Show videos of stone carving (see under Extended Learning).
- Students with limited dexterity may use clay tools and spoons with Play-Doh.

CLOSURE

1. For the class critique, each student should have the following:
 - their completed sculpture
 - their journal (or 2 sheets of paper)
 - a pencil
2. Ask the students how their sculptures are similar and different to those by artist William Edmondson.
3. Ask the students to explain the “subtractive” method as a sculptural process by writing down the definition in their own words. Revisit the shoebox with the examples of each carving step. Tell students to draw a diagram of each step in their journals.
4. Hold up the spoon, the butter knife, and 1 or 2 of the clay tools. Ask the students to draw each tool and explain how they used it.

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

- Language Arts
- Science

EXTENDED LEARNING

Activities:

- Dick Blick Art Materials, “[Positive and Negative Space](#)” lesson plan, dickblick.com
- Eve Simon, “[Soap Sculptures](#)” lesson plan, ForeBC, landscapesmag.com
- Michael Svedman, [Angel](#) lesson plan, Loyola University of Chicago, luc.edu
- wikiHow, “[How to Make a Soap Carving](#),” wikihow.com

Articles and books:

- Cheekwood Museum of Art, [The Art of William Edmondson](#) (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000)
- Elizabeth Spires, [I Heard God Talking to Me: William Edmondson and His Stone Carvings](#) (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009)
- Angela Wibking, "[Carving a Name](#)," *Nashville Scene*, January 2, 2000
- "[William Edmondson](#)," *Outsider Art Now*, January 22, 2015

Videos:

- Frist Center for the Visual Arts, "[Exploring Sculpture](#)," [ArtQuest: Art Is All Around You](#) (2015; available at fristkids.org)
- Frist Center for the Visual Arts, "[Space in Art](#)," [ArtQuest: Art Is All Around You](#) (2014; available at fristkids.org)
- Getty Museum, [Carving Marble with Traditional Tools](#) (2010; available at YouTube.com)
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts, [Introduction to Stone Carving Tools and Techniques](#) (2011; available at YouTube.com)
- Tulsa City Council, [Tulsa Public Art: Limestone Sculpture Carved at Guthrie Green](#) (2014; available at YouTube.com)

Webpage:

- ArtsConnectEd, "[Shape](#)," *The Artist's Toolkit Encyclopedia* (Minneapolis Institute of Arts and Walker Art Center)

For additional lesson plans and activities, visit us at fristkids.org. This lesson plan was created by an art education student in the Frist Center for the Visual Arts' Teaching Assistant Program under the guidance of education department staff and/or a mentor teacher. The Teaching Assistant Program is designed to introduce participants to museum education by providing unique teaching experiences in an informal learning environment. For more information about this program or other educational opportunities offered by the Frist Center, please visit fristcenter.org.

