

A Sheepish Composition

This lesson plan introduces wool roving, which is raw, washed sheep wool that has been dyed a variety of beautiful colors. Wool roving will be used to “paint” a “canvas” of felt. Lastly, the wool will be “felted,” or punched, into the background with a felting needle.

Have you ever taken a drive in the country and seen a pasture full of fluffy sheep happily grazing? Sheep are very useful animals that are often raised for their fiber or hair. If they are not sheared at least once a year, they become very stressed and uncomfortable, especially when it is hot and humid. Shearing doesn’t hurt the sheep; it’s just like getting a haircut.

Fiber art is a type of fine art which uses textiles such as wool, fabric, yarn, thread and other fibers as the medium. Weaving, quilting, sewing, spinning, wet felting, needle felting, knitting and crocheting are only a handful of the crafts that fall under the fiber art category.

Abstract Expressionist color-field painters like Helen Frankenthaler and Mark Rothko can give us wonderful inspiration when beginning to design a “wool painting.” Color is laid down in large, sweeping shapes. Fuzzy edges and blurred areas are often seen, mimicking the effect of watercolors even though the paintings were done in oil. The artists diluted their oil paints with turpentine to thin them out then allowed them to soak into an unprimed canvas.

Grade Levels K-12

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust them as needed.



Materials

Wistyr Editions 100% Wool Roving, assorted color sets of eight (63235-); share two sets among the class



Acrylic Felt, assortment of 25, 9" x 12" pieces (63232-1023); share one package among the class



Felting Needles, package of four (63122-1004); share six packages among class



Clover Felting Mat, reusable (63236-); one per student (or you can use a disposable foam felting block as shown in the photos)



Blick® Pastels, set of 24 (20016-1109); share among the class

Strathmore® 300 Series Newsprint, rough, 50-sheet pad, 9" x 12" (12402-1023); one sheet per student

OPTIONAL MATERIALS

Bendable Blunt Plastic Needle, package of 12 (65103-1009)

Blunt Tapestry Needles, #18, package of 12 (66903-1009)

Brightly Colored Burlap, 36" x 48" (63202-)

Creativity Street® Embroidery Floss, set of 24 skeins (63100-1009)

Roylco® Bright Buttons, 1-lb (60975-0001)

Preparation

1. Study images of Abstract Expressionist color-field painters such as Helen Frankenthaler and Mark Rothko.
2. Prepare the wool roving for distribution by pulling the skeins apart into smaller pieces.



Process

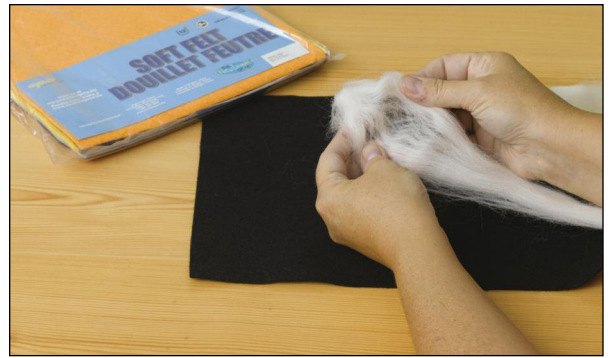
1. Sketch a composition on a 9" x 12" sheet of paper using pastels. Alternatively, students may compose as they go.
2. Start working on the felt background. Pull the wool apart into thin, gauze-like pieces and lay it down on the felt. Continue until the background is complete. You can completely cover the background with wool fiber or allow parts of the felt to show through.

Grades 6-12

3. Place the finished felt background on top of the felting mat.
4. Using the felting needle, attach the wool to the background by punching through the wool and into the felt and the felting mat. The strands of wool are barbed, and by felting them with the needle, they will attach to each other and to the background.

CAUTION: The felting needle is sharp and barbed, so care must be taken to stab directly down into the felting mat. Always "park" the needle in the felting mat when it is not in use.

5. Move from one area of the artwork to the next until all areas have been felted. Check the back of the piece to see where the needle has been. The more the needle has been punched through, the better the wool will adhere to the felt. The wool will stick to the felting mat, so occasionally pull it away.
6. Add details to your work using denser pieces of wool or pieces that you have twisted with your fingers. Felt the additions into place with the felting needle as before.



Step 1: Pull the wool apart into thin, gauze-like pieces and arrange the pieces on the felt background.



Step 2: Lay out thin areas of wool until the background is complete.



Step 3, middle and high school ages: Place the felt over a felting mat. Attach the wool by punching it through the felt with a felting needle.



Step 3, elementary ages: Attach the wool to a burlap background using a blunt plastic needle.



National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes.

K-4 Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories.

5-8 Students select media, techniques and processes; analyze what makes them effective or not effective in communicating ideas; and reflect upon the effectiveness of their choices and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

9-12 Students apply media, techniques and processes with sufficient skill, confidence and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #2 — Using knowledge of structures and functions.

K-4 Students describe how different expressive features and organizational principles cause different responses.

5-8 Students generalize about the effects of visual structures and functions and reflect upon these effects in their own work.

9-12 Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems.

Grades K-5

Younger ages can “felt” the wool to a burlap background with a blunt plastic needle. For added adhesion, a layer of fabric glue should be applied to the back of the burlap.

Options

1. Use the completed piece of felt just like fabric. Make a pencil pouch, for example, by folding the felted rectangle, stitching up the sides and adding a button.

