



The Empathy Pawject

Lesson #4: Under Painting Wash

Lesson Overview

In this lesson students will learn how to create an underpainting, or wash, as the first step in creating their portraits!

A wash consists of semi-transparent layers of paint. It is also known as an underpainting! Underpainting allows the artist to map out a composition before applying the final brushstrokes to their artwork.

Different mediums require different layering techniques. For the purposes of this project, the students use acrylic paint and dilute the paint with water to create a wash. If you are altering this project for older kids and want to use oil or watercolour paint, or if you are altering it for younger children and want to use tempera paint, please feel free to reach out with any questions you may have about doing a wash with these mediums. Tempera for example, can be extremely tricky as it doesn't set the way other paints do so a wash is not ideal as it will mix with the next layer of paint you apply.

Please see the last page of this lesson plan for a student example gallery of wash paintings.

Lesson Materials

- 1) the canvas or material they have already begun working on
- 2) a bucket of water
- 3) acrylic paint (Please see lesson overview if you plan to use another type of paint...any will work but it may change how you approach an underpainting.)
- 4) one paint brush per student: For this, especially for the younger grades, do not fuss too much about having the right type of brush! I use a simple square shader brush with my student for this part but, a round brush or a filbert would work perfectly!
- 5) one cool or warm coloured acrylic paint.
- 6) one other colour of their choice and white. These colours will come in during the third step of the wash when they block in their backgrounds.
- 7) a palette to put their paint on (this can be used to mix their lighter shades using water to dilute the paint)

Recommended: A power point presentation with images of a wash painting from start to finish to help give them an idea of the end product.

A note about paint colour choices: The underpainting can be done with either a warm tone wash or a cool tone wash – both work equally well. In my first year of teaching The Empathy Pawject, I started



with a cobalt blue colour to teach the underpainting lesson. My theory at the time is that the cool tone would create depth in the students' work. If you choose cool tones it is important to talk a lot about colour theory before proceeding as your students may be confused as to why they are painting fur with a colour like blue. I began researching what other artists used for their underpaintings. It seemed that in terms of animal portraits, the popular colour is actually burnt sienna or yellow ochre. Following my research, I demonstrated underpainting with both options and let the students choose what to use on their own project. Most decided to go with a warm colour, but a few chose the cool colour. The choice gave students greater ownership of the project and increased their decisiveness and confidence as artists!

**Curriculum outcome:
(from the Alberta Education Program of Studies for Grade 4 Art)**

- Explore painting media (AC: 10iii b) (CHC 10h)
- Value (Element of Art): use to create illusion of space (AC: 4e, 6c)

Learning Activity

Once you have the students set up with paint, water, brushes and their dog's profile photo, you can show them some images of wash stages. Then with your easel set up walk them through these steps:



Step 1: Sketch using one colour.

Using water, dilute the paint only a little. It will become washier as we carry on with the steps. Sketch out the dog with the paint and a paintbrush, using the pencil underneath as a guide.



Step 2: Block in Dark Areas.

Look for the darkest darks (these may have been mapped out already in graphite during the generic drawing lesson.) For this you will use just paint and only enough water to make it smooth to apply.





Step 3: Block in the background.

During a later lesson we will fill in our background with all the things they want to see for their dog once their dog finds their forever family. Before we go to that step though we want to get rid of the primed white canvas colour and add a shade of colour. For this they may have another colour of their choice and white if they would like to make it even lighter than the diluted wash colour they are currently using. Have them carefully and lightly fill in their background with this colour. If they accidentally go over top of their dog sketch, that is ok! It is just the under painting so it's an easy fix!



Step 4: Add highlights.

Fill in any sections that are lighter using a very diluted mixture of acrylic and water. Once that is complete look for the lightest values on the dog photograph and use titanium white acrylic to highlight those areas! (or Buff White for a warmer version of these highlights)





End of Class Discussion:

I always like to end class with a few “check in” type questions and a comment or two to get them thinking ahead to the next class.

What we have done today: Here you could leave about 5 minutes and ask your students how they felt about painting a wash.

- Was it tricky?
- Easier than they expected?
- What did they notice about adding more water?
- What about more pigment?
- Were they happy with the colour they choose?

What’s coming up next: Next week we will repeat this process except we will be choosing light and dark colours for our dogs. The under wash will act like a guide as to where to block in those dark colours and where to add the highlights. Take some time between classes to think of all the colours you could add to your dog’s fur and face details!

Gallery of Student Wash Painting Examples



