

Tarpaper Marine Life, Reaction to the Oil Spill (inspired by artist Tres Taylor and impacted from collaborations with Weeks Bay Estuarine Reserve)

Lesson Created by Nancy Raia, Community Outreach Director, Eastern Shore Art Center

Materials needed: tarpaper purchased at any Home Depot, Lowe's, Ace Hardware (lighter grade is easier to cut, runs less than \$30 per roll), chalk, crayons to mark names on the back, acrylic paints, brushes, marine reference materials, oil based varnish to seal.

Introduction: Begin with asking students if they heard about the oil spills. Have them write down for ten minutes any thoughts, or images that come to mind. Younger students, engage them in the discussion, I often bring in a bottle of Dawn dish soap and ask them what it's used for, then lead up to how much of it was donated to clean the oil off of feathers, and fur. Let's them think about corporate charity, some like to sketch out a new label for Dawn with the wildlife they saved on it.

Pass out the tarpaper cut in size appropriate to time allotted. Younger children work better on a larger piece, older ones may want to do several pieces, leading up to multiple marine life in one pieces. Have them write their name in white crayon on the back side (the one with lines) Pick up crayons before the next step!

Pass out chalk and marine resource specimens. I usually do a demo first, letting them watch me draw, paint and then I repeat it with them. Doing the process this way lets them visualize how I use the space, and how I can fix any problems (wet a paper towel and gently wash away the error), also how to plan ahead to leave in the black outline. This is a good time, as I demo, to discuss color choices, I usually prefer to paint the fish a color that is complemented by the background choice.

Draw something (let's say mine is a pinfish). Show them using a large image will be easier to paint later, add in some details, but not too much, with the chalk. Put in initials in the corner. Show them that a lot of white needs to be added to just about every color you use on black tarpaper. Sometimes I paint the area white first and then put the color on top. Others, I mix the white in as I apply it. I come close to, but don't ever paint over the white chalk lines. Younger children, if I demo a jellyfish, I tell them it will "sting me" if I touch the chalk lines. I make a game out of it, and keep repeating this step. I leave a little space on each side of the chalk line as I paint in the areas. Sometimes I choose to leave the eyes completely black, maybe just adding a dot of light color or white.

As I paint, I talk about color choices, and not touching the chalk lines. I show them that leaving some spaces completely black is a design choice, and to be desired. (Some children will want to paint the piece of tarpaper completely, and I constantly have to point out the black showing through is a desired effect).

As I demo the background waters, I often like to show the fish, crab, shrimp, whatever, in movement, swimmingly healthy. This involves having the water move around the creature, not having the background painted smoothly left to right like you're painting a kitchen wall. Sometime I demo the water coming up the fish's front end and splashing away as the fish's mouth breaks through the water. Older children love this image, and the movement and how the backgrounds within a classroom can

vary widely with their creativity. Show them that leaving some little bits of black showing through is interesting. Last step, I show them how to isolate their initials as they work on the background, show them how to paint around them, including any enclosed spaces (like inside a P or D , you must go in the loop with color as well). I usually prefer to leave a slight edge of black revealed around the edge.

When the paintings are dry, usually within a few hours, you can varnish them with oil based varnish. I use the Marine Spar varnish, but you can get a generic at your local store. Some of them have an amber hue, which I like the look. It sort of ages, and dirties the painting, making it look like it really did get washed over with oil. You can't predict where that amber part will go, and it is interesting to see the results after they are all done. Some of you may prefer the clear gloss oil based varnish, younger children won't understand why their image got "dirty".

The best way to "cure" them is to varnish them and allow to dry in the warm/hot sun. I use plastic gloves and an inexpensive chip brush from the hardware store to apply, and simply discard it with each round of varnishing. The odor is strong, so do it outside! Or use a vacant room or area after hours or on a weekend. Be sure and put plastic cloths down underneath the varnish area. If you leave that slight raw edge as I suggested, you don't have to paint all the way to the edges and it won't stick to the protective covers underneath them when you varnish. Adaptations for younger students: You can use black cardstock as the paper to work on, teaching them to draw or paint with white chalk or white tempera.

Suggestions on displays: Create an oil spill with black ground cover cloth used for weed control (at any hardware store)...it can be cut to cover, or flow over any surface. Place the images on the floor, and surround with yellow booms made from \$1 pool tubes. It shows how the actual oil spill had to be contained. Let the students write messages to the creatures they hoped would be resilient and survive.

Varnished tarpaper can be attached to black foam core with Liquid Nails for display, or to wood pieces as well. Many have bought the pieces as is and prefer to find their own way to frame it, or hang it loose from an old oar or found object wood debris. Small mesh net laundry bags (again from the Dollar Store), make great cast nets to hold them for each student if you add to wood dowels to each end to be the handling poles.

Summary thoughts: This project was invented as a direct response to the reaction of the Gulf Coast oil spill known as the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. Having the students spend some time researching or reading about oil spills in general brings up the thinking of what species (at all levels, including plankton) can be impacted by environmental concerns. I have met a great many young students training in environmental sciences and I believe the best way to retain a science lesson taught at an estuary (Weeks Bay is my partner often) is to learn the science facts, preferably in the field and then record it with a well thought out personal approach to recordkeeping with an art activity. Have a science teacher bring in touch tank specimens to draw from would be the ideal! Cast netting and releasing is my chosen option locally for the students to see the nursery that an estuary is, and how where the rivers meet the sea is a place to protect very carefully the next growing generation of marine life!

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