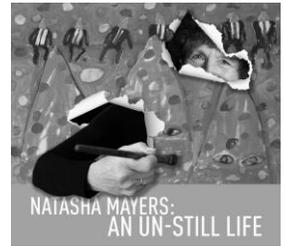


**Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life**  
**ELEMENTARY LESSON**

April 2021

This lesson was created to accompany the film **Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life**. You are encouraged to adopt this as presented here, adapt it to your teaching situation, or use it as a starting point to design a lesson for your student population.



**TITLE:** Together We Swim: Telling Our Story With Art

**Overview:**

Students will start with a reading of the picture book *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni and follow up with the creation of a collaborative mural. Once the project is complete and hung, the students will view two clips from the film **Natasha Mayers: An UnStill Life**. The reading, discussion of the book theme, and creation of the mural will give students first-hand experience with using art to convey a message or tell a story.

- Through this introduction, meaningful connections to Natasha as an artist, activist, and collaborator can be made. (*MLR - Artist's Purpose; Aesthetics and Criticism*)
- Students work independently and collaboratively. (*MLR - Disciplinary Literacy; Creative Problem-Solving*)
- Self-assessment and group critique (*MLR - Making Meaning*)



Photo of 12'x6' mural made with 4th graders at Deer Isle-Stonington Elementary School with their principal, Catherine Ring, circa 2007.

## **DETAILS OF LESSON - *READING AND ART MAKING***

The class will re-create the story of *Swimmy* through a mural (suggested size 12'x6') using paint, collage, and other art materials.

This is a lesson that K-4 students will enjoy. It can be adapted for middle level, especially if the older students are creating a mural from children's literature and will interact with younger students by reading the story, introducing the mural when it is finished, and explaining the message in it. When stepping back from the mural when completed, the effect is pronounced. Placement of the mural for maximum viewing is important (i.e., probably a narrow hall is not the best viewing choice).

### **READING**

The teacher will read the children's book *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni. The story is about a little black fish named Swimmy who is terribly upset that his red fish friends have been scared into hiding by a big black tuna fish. He swims around pleading with them to come out and play with him. He gets an idea that he tells his friends -- If you come out and we swim together, we can form a huge fish and scare that bully away! Swimmy leads the way, as the Eye of their Big Fish.

During the reading, students will have the chance to discuss the characters and their behaviors, and consider how it makes them feel. Words to introduce might include *bullying, bystander, intolerance, injustice, unfairness, collaboration, partnership, courage, leadership*.

- Take time to stop and look at the pages and talk about the way the artist used paints and watercolors to paint the pictures.
- Discuss the story line. What was the outcome of the story? Was Swimmy a hero?
- Discuss the bullying theme and how Swimmy resolves the problem. (He got everyone to work collaboratively to scare away the bully.)
- Introduce vocabulary words (injustice, bullying, intolerance, etc.)
- Brainstorm the variety of natural sea life found in the ocean and talk about all the colors that one might find there.

### **ART MAKING**

#### **To Create the Ocean**

Ask up to six children at a time to come to the ocean table. Rotate when they have had a turn so everyone gets to paint on the ocean.

*Suggested materials: 2 pieces of Butcher Paper (3' x 12'), sponges, plates for paints and wet sponges, tempera or acrylic paints - blue, grey, white, purple, green, black.*

Discuss with students which **colors** might be used to paint the ocean. Students use sponges with a color and sponge-print the color in multiple places on the paper. Encourage moving to new areas to paint, so that students are rotating around the perimeter of the mural paper to paint in several areas. Discuss **lines** (wavy, straight, curved, thick, thin) they can use. Other vocabulary to introduce/discuss include **motion, contrast, texture, pattern, rhythm**.

### **To Create the Red Fish and Swimmy**

While the six children are painting the ocean background, each child in the rest of the class creates a fish, almost the size of the paper, and individually decorates with craypas patterns and designs. Create scales, patterns, and designs on the fish with craypas. Cut fish out. Discuss **texture, shape, form, unity, balance**.

*Suggested materials: One piece of 9 x 12 red construction paper per child, 1 piece of 9 x 12 black paper to create Swimmy, glue, craypas, scissors*

### **To Create Other Forms of Ocean Life**

Research and have prepared lots of images of sea life as references. Discuss what is possible. Students will create many different forms of sea life to add to the mural once their red fish is completed.

*Suggested materials: White paper, watercolors, craypas*

### **To Create a Scene from Swimmy**

A second piece of butcher paper can be painted by another class and then assembled with the first. When everything is dry, tape the two butcher papers together into one large 6' x 12' piece and have the class help you assemble their fish in the pattern of a big fish. Manipulate until you create the fish shape before gluing down. When all agree, glue down! Teachers could have students add the tail end of a tuna fish on the right side of the mural to show that the red fish scared it away.

Put a plaque or description of the project next to the mural. What is the message in this collaborative mural? (We can all work together (swim in unison) to achieve a common goal (scare the big bad tuna away).)

When hung in a strategic school hallway, this mural makes a great visual statement about working together, collaborating, standing up to bullying, creating a safe environment together for every living creature.

**FILM VIEWING AND DISCUSSION**

Tell students they will be watching a film clip about an artist, Natasha Mayers, who tells stories and expresses messages through her artwork.

Show Excerpt #2: *Friends - Artists and Collaboration* located at <https://vimeo.com/527562972>. Students will recognize similarities between their collaborative mural and Natasha and Cathy flying overhead with their capes, ready to change the world.

- Talk about collaboration, how working together can be more powerful than working alone. Introduce vocabulary words such as **truth telling, injustice, bystander, anti-bullying, intolerance, friendship**.
- When Natasha and Cathy are flying overhead, does that remind you of Swimmy leading the red fish?
- Ask students what they think ARRT! is (<https://arrteam.org/>). Can they think of something similar that they are a part of, e.g., art club, Girl Scouts, sports league?
- How could students form a group to help combat bullying in their school, e.g., could they establish a positive school culture committee or anti-bullying campaign? Could they use art to help spread their message?

Show Excerpt# 1 *Life at Home: Painting and Skating* located at <https://vimeo.com/527565774>. Students will see the many ways Natasha uses her art.

- How is art used to tell stories? To make people think? To entertain the community?
- How does Natasha think she can help to change the world?
- Can you change the world with art? Can your class? Your school?

**ASSESSMENT**

Through observations of formative discussions about the film and the art making, teachers can use a checklist of goals from the Maine Learning Results to check for understanding from students.

**MAINE LEARNING RESULTS:**

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/content/arts>

*Note: These are the selected visual arts standards for grades PK-2 and grades 3-5 that are aligned with this lesson as written.*

**PreK-2 and Grades 3-5**

A. Disciplinary Literacy: Students show literacy in the art discipline by understanding and demonstrating concepts, skills, terminology, and processes.

A.1. Artist's Purpose

Students recognize a variety of purposes for making art, including telling a story, communicating emotion, or beautifying functional objects.

**A.2. Elements of Art and Principles of Design**

Students identify features of composition. (*PreK-2*)

- Identify Elements of Art: **color, form, line, shape, space, texture, and value.**
- Identify Principles of Design including **pattern** and **balance.**

Students describe features of composition. (*Grades 3-5*)

- Describe Elements of Art: **color, form, line, shape, space, texture, and value.**
- Describe Principles of Design including **pattern** and **balance.**

**B. Creation, Performance, and Expression - Visual Arts:** Students create, express, and communicate through the art discipline.

**B.1. Media Skills**

- Students use basic media, tools, and techniques to create original art works. (*PreK-2*)
- Students use a variety of **media, tools, techniques, and processes** to create original art works. (*Grades 3-5*)

**B.2. Composition Skills**

- Students use Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create original art works. (*PreK-5*)

**B.3. Making Meaning**

- Students create art works that communicate ideas and feelings and demonstrate skill in the use of media, tools, and techniques. (*PreK-5*)
- Students create art works that communicate ideas, feelings, and meanings, and demonstrate skill in the use of media, tools, techniques, and processes. (*Grades 3-5*)

**C. Creative Problem Solving:** Students approach artistic problem solving using multiple solutions and the creative process.

**C.1. Application**

- Students identify and demonstrate creative problem-solving skills.
- Imagine and share possible solutions to apply to challenges in creating art.

**E. Visual and Performing Arts Connections**

**E.5. Interpersonal Skills**

Students identify and demonstrate the positive interpersonal skills necessary to get along with others and participate in the arts. (*Grades 3-6*)

- a. Getting along with others
- b. Respecting differences
- c. Working as a team/ensemble
- d. Managing conflict
- e. Accepting/giving/using constructive feedback
- f. Accepting responsibility for personal behavior
- g. Demonstrating ethical behavior
- h. Following established rules/etiquette for observing/listening to art
- i. Demonstrating safe behavior

**NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS:**

<https://www.nationalartsstandards.org>

*Note: These are the selected visual arts national standards that are aligned with this lesson as written.*

**Artistic Processes:** Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding, and Connecting

**Creating**

Anchor Standard #2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #3: Refine and complete artistic work.

**Performing/Presenting/Producing**

Anchor Standard #5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard #6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

**Responding**

Anchor Standard #8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

**Connecting**

Anchor Standard #10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard #11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.