

My third-graders love to paint their experiences at beaches, rivers and lakes. Artist Claude Monet also liked to paint landscapes and water-scapes, once saying, “For me, a landscape does not exist in its own right, since its appearance changes at every moment, but the surrounding atmosphere brings it to life—the light and the air which vary continually. For me, it is only the surrounding atmosphere which gives subjects their true values.”

TO SET THE MOOD FOR THIS UNIT, I read to the class, *Twilight Comes Twice*, by Ralph Fletcher and Kate Kiesler (Clarion Books, 1997). This book has beautiful watercolor illustrations and free-verse text, describing the magical moments of dawn and dusk. It creates the perfect ambiance for the lesson, with its atmospheric illustrations perfectly partnered with its imagery-rich text.

Jamie works on the group project. >

Kayla applies her paint like Monet v



Painting and THINKING like Monet

by Gigi D'Ambrosio

I then project several of Monet's paintings that feature reflections in water mirrored by breathtaking skies (e.g. *Morning on the Seine Near Giverny*, *Impression Sunrise* (see p. 45), and *Sunset in Venice*), and ask the children to describe what they see. Sunshine, sunset, yellow, pink, purple skies, mysterious, and foggy skies are some of the descriptions they share.

“Monet was painting in a new and different way,” I tell them. “He used dabs of paint visible when viewing a painting up close, but as a viewer moved away from his paintings, the clearer the subject would become.”

We then stand very close to Monet's projected artwork and then slowly back away from it. Students exclaim, “Ms. D., you are right; you can barely see his brushstrokes far away, but when you step closer everything comes together!”

NEXT CLASS, I tell the children we are going to paint water-scapes like Monet by using their choice of tempera, oil pastel, watercolor or acrylics to paint a sky. I project Monet's paint-

ings once more, to remind them how he used small dabs and strokes of color, and how he reflected the colors in the sky onto the water.

I also tell them they will all have an opportunity to paint on the large canvas displayed on one side of the room. It would be an “impressionistic” group project with acrylics, which we would proudly hang in the art room.

To begin the art making, I demonstrate how to use tempera by adding a vibrant, opaque color to a flat brush and touching my paper in small horizontal strokes (known as “tache,” French for blotch, mark or stain). Monet would use



Ralph Fletcher's book, *Twilight Comes Twice* —with its beautiful watercolor illustrations and free-verse text—creates

the perfect atmosphere for this lesson. (Illustrated by Kate Kiesler. Clarion Books, 1997.)



▲ Leticia
◀ Brayden

NEXT, I DEMONSTRATE USING THE OIL PASTELS, telling students that using them is like using crayons, but there are many more ways to take advantage of them: like dipping them into water or brushing water on top of the pastel to make the artwork look “paint-like.”

I then show them how to use the “wet-on-wet” watercolor technique, which produces unpredictable and exciting results. The way colors flow, diffuse (spread), and blend (mix) with each other seems magical to the children.

First applying a layer of water on your paper and then applying small dabs of color to it produces transparent colors—a striking effect. Students also see how, if paint is applied to the paper while it is still glossy wet, colors will diffuse (spread) over the painting, producing undefined shapes. When softer, more controlled brushstrokes are wanted, just wait until the surface is no longer glossy, but still damp to the touch, before applying the paint.

To create lighter areas, touch the darkened area lightly with tissue paper and carefully lift it straight up. Students love doing this to make clouds while the paper is wet.

I also demonstrate the table-salt texture technique, as I tell them to watch closely as I perform a “magic trick.” A little salt sprinkled on damp watercolor paint creates an intricate flower-like spot. Each crystal takes away pigment, making a lighter area beneath it. Students use this technique to create such things as flowers, snow, leaves on trees, and stars in the sky. I tell them to take only a pinch of salt in their fingers and sprinkle a few crystals (otherwise, they often use *way* too much salt.) I also tell them to let the painting dry

this impressionist technique for his reflections.

My students love to experiment with color-mixing, so they each have a plastic plate to create unpredictable colors. “Wow, I mixed a little red with violet and made a perfect color for my sunset,” says one student. Such moments of discovery provide opportunities for me to point to the color wheel on the wall, and talk about the intermediate colors.

I suggest students repeat some of their sky colors in their water, so there will be reflections of the sky in the water. I use the simile, “the water is like a mirror” and ask, “If you have an orange shirt, will it be blue in the mirror?” Students understand the point, and make sure the colors match.



MATERIALS

- Color-wheel poster
- Canvas, 9" x 12" watercolor paper
- Tempera and acrylic paint, spackle
- Variety of paintbrushes
- Table salt, tissue paper
- Plastic plates for mixing paint
- Watercolor sets

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| • Atmosphere | • Intermediate colors |
| • Background | • Landscapes |
| • Blend | • Middle ground |
| • Broken line | • Opaque |
| • Diffuse | • Reflections |
| • Foreground | • Transparent |
| • Glossy | • Waterscapes |
| • Horizon line | • Wet-on-wet |
| • Impasto | • Wet-on-dry |



Go to [artsandactivities.com](https://www.artsandactivities.com) and click on this button for resources related to this article.

Erin ^
Eli >

without disturbing the salt so they can brush it away after it dries. My students get so excited during the next class, after they brush away the salt and see the astonishing results.

MY NEXT DEMONSTRATION is the wet-on-dry technique. Using a small brush with a point about three-quarters of the way down the paper, I paint a broken line to create a horizon. I use a dark color made by mixing blue with brown and tell the children that Monet would mix these two colors for a more natural hue, instead of using pure black.

To create a background on the horizon line, I add small nature shapes found in our region of South Carolina, like mountains, and palm or cypress trees. To give an idea of scale, I may add larger shapes, such as a peninsula of trees or grass, to the middle ground on one side of my paper.

In the foreground, I add *even larger* images, such as grasses, cattails, and more trees on the shore. I tell students to add more water to the black mixture and repeat the

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Elementary students will ...

- learn about the art of Claude Monet.
- apply and expand their critical-thinking skills in a creative process.
- learn to use tempera, acrylic, and watercolor paint.
- learn to use oil pastels.
- learn the watercolor techniques of "wet on wet" and "wet on dry."
- paint a seascape reflected in water and further their understanding of shapes in nature.
- learn how to mix two colors next to each other on the color wheel to create "intermediate colors."

NATIONAL ART STANDARDS

- CREATING: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- PRESENTING: Interpreting and sharing artistic work.
- RESPONDING: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- CONNECTING: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.



shapes upside down to make reflections in the water. Finally, I show students how to take a stiff, flat, dry brush and scrape the brushstrokes vertically to make a more water-like reflection, much like is seen in Monet's paintings.

I demonstrate how to mix acrylics with spackle to make the paint resemble cake icing, giving it a thick texture called "impasto." This was a wonderful motivator to get the process started.

As they create their art, students happily chat with one another about materials, techniques and processes. When the artworks are complete, each student has the opportunity to talk about their work during an "artist share." They celebrate their learning and are proud of their accomplishments.

It makes it all worthwhile when my students ask, "*May I paint like Monet again?*" ■

Gigi D'Ambrosio, NBCT, teaches art at Inman Elementary School in Inman, South Carolina.