

**A Study of Experimental Texture in the Art
of Middle and High School Students**

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Experimentation plays a large role in the art classroom. The purpose of this research brief is to analyze middle and high school students and their textural experimentation with unique artistic materials in order to better understand their artistic development. Theoretically, according to Amorino (2019), “developmentally appropriate themes, motivational dialogues, sensory processes, and a gradually expanding repertoire of materials are all factors which play co-informing roles in artistic learning” (p. 216). With the focus of this research brief being textural experimentation, in order to build a repertoire of materials to create artwork, there needs to be a multitude of materials for students to experiment with to grow their media library. The middle school artwork, in the beginning of this research, focuses on textured mediums and not subject or concept. In the end, the older grades used texture to their advantage when creating conceptual pieces. No specific media is the focal point in the collection of images, and rather all artworks display a variety of mixed media projects.

While searching for youth art that contained unusual textural materials, I searched outside the realm of just practice in technique. While looking at middle school art, it was difficult to find art instruction that displayed distinct results. However, high school grades showed a great representation of experimental media. This larger display of materials also created a variety of final outcomes of art projects. In middle school, even with material experimentation, results might end up looking very similar to each other. Exploration of materials provides a gateway for unique artistic outcomes, but Amorino (2009) cautions that “sensory stimulation through genuine play can lead to creative habits of mind only if not obstructed by conventional, outcome-based goals

which can stifle the motivation to explore” (p. 217). This means that students should be allowed to choose their exploratory materials and develop their skill the best way they see fit, without being forced to construct any particular desired results. Texture is an intriguing concept, and a play with materials allows students to see and create ideas beyond simple media like pencil and paper.

Middle School Experiments in Texture

As middle school students begin to explore an assortment of artistic materials, a greater benefit to their artistic development would be to include materials that are experimental and unusual to a typical art classroom. Talking from personal experience as an art student and art teacher, there is a particular feeling that arises when you realize an eccentric material may be used to create artwork. Sakr and Kucirkova (2016) note that “in the context of children’s art-making, the abstract and experimental dimensions of the art-making experience are often side-lined, while the creation of discernible representations is prioritized” (p. 17). The examples that follow show abstract, non-representation, and representational examples of material experimentation.

Figure 1 is a non-representational piece of art created from the unique texture comprised of dry food. Beans, rice, and pasta create an intriguing, beautiful, and movement-filled piece of art. There is great balance between the contrast of colors, and the physical texture created by uncommon materials. While this piece stands out on its own, it was gathered from a collection of similar looking artworks because all students were distributed the same experimental textural materials. Although Figure 1 shows

great harmony and unity on its own, if placed in the collection of the same classroom experiment it loses emphasis.

Figure 1

Middle school texture experiment with dry food



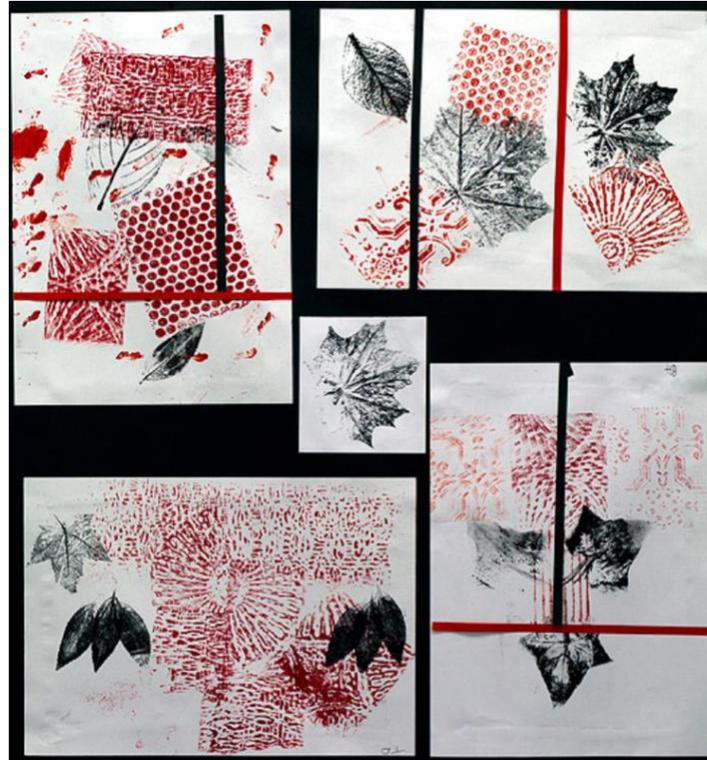
Note: Adapted from Artsonia.com, 2020 (<https://www.artsonia.com/museum/art.asp?id=84246041>).

Compared to Figure 1, Figure 2 displays visual texture created from print-making techniques from found objects and textured paper. Due to the nature of found objects compiled by the students, there is more variety in the piece from student to student. The monochrome print is developed into a visually pleasing composition compiled from

leaves and textured paper. Black and red visual texture allow the eyes to move around the image while exploring the unusual patterns

Figure 2

Middle school texture experiment with print making



Note: Adapted from the website of art teacher Julia Stubbs, 2015 (<http://juliastubbs.co.uk/ks2/ks2-to-ks3-2015/ks2-to-ks3-induction-01.html>).

Just as Figure 1 focused on non-representational texture-based experiments, Figure 3 relied on foil and drawing to create a curious outcome. Organic shapes created from aluminum foil dominate the composition atop black construction paper. Patterned drawings accompany the texture directly on the foil balanced by colored drawings directly on the construction paper.

Figure 3

Middle school texture experiment with aluminum foil



Note: Adapted from Artsonia.com, 2020 (<https://www.artsonia.com/museum/art.asp?id=87720260>).

In order to complement the non-representational and abstract pieces of art, Figure 4 displays a still life of a potted plant. The still life is created using the same markings but on different styles of paper. Observational skills are put to the test changing from one material to the other. Pencils, charcoal, pen and ink were used to

make marks over scratchboard, newspaper, and butcher paper to create a range of visual and physical texture in the drawing. While the texture of the paper varies, the composition is limited in variety.

Figure 4

Middle school texture experiment with paper variety



Note: Adapted from Artsonia.com, 2020 (<https://www.artsonia.com/museum/art.asp?id=87811643>).

The middle school artworks create a sense of wonder through the textural experimentation projects. Dissanayake (1974) wrote that “necessity may often be the mother of invention, but this should not obscure the fact that playful experimentation may also stimulate and suggest discoveries” (p. 214). The discoveries arise from the multiplicity of unusual mediums that may enhance student curiosity. While concept is limited in the above artworks, the experimental materials allow the students to progress into experimenting with concept and materials as they get older.

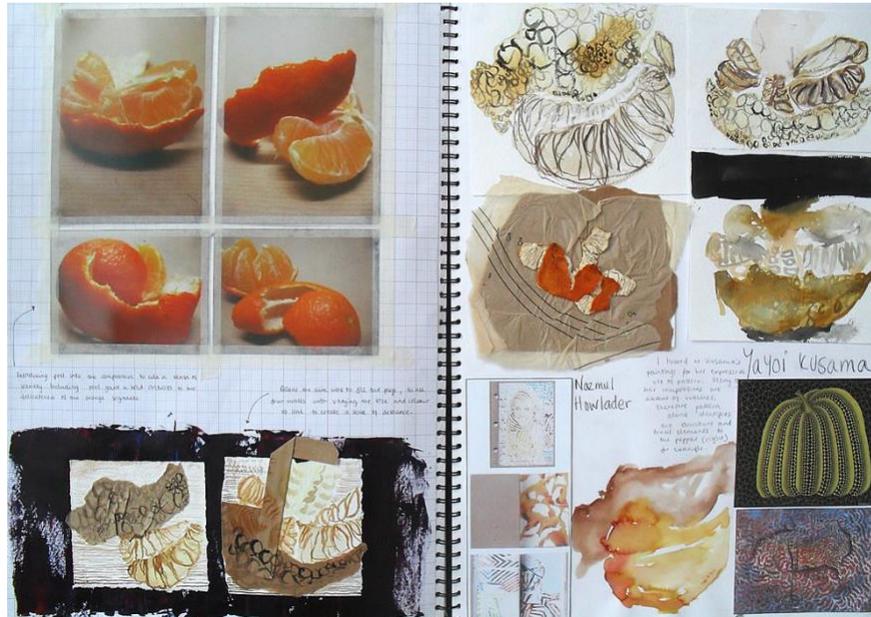
High School Experiments in Texture

Middle school art focused strategically on the experimental aspect of creating texture. Most high school art included in this brief incorporate experimental texture along with a conceptual framework. Marshal (2010) wrote that “in the case of artistic inquiry, learning entails active construction of knowledge through hands-on exploration and experimentation, which are interwoven with and shaped by creative thinking” (p. 16). The experimentation and inquiry within the high school examples lead to greater artistic development.

Figure 5 incorporates research from thriving contemporary artists, student annotation, several object references, and a plethora of visual and physical texture experiments. Wolf (1988) wrote that “skilled or creative individuals often pursue the “same” problem across a series of works or experiments”, and “in this way, they learn to approach an issue or idea from many points of view” (p. 151). The student artist creates a complex spread of information within the two sketchbook pages by evaluating the subject, the orange fruit, over several textural media choices.

Figure 5

Texture experiment in a sketchbook with artist references and annotations

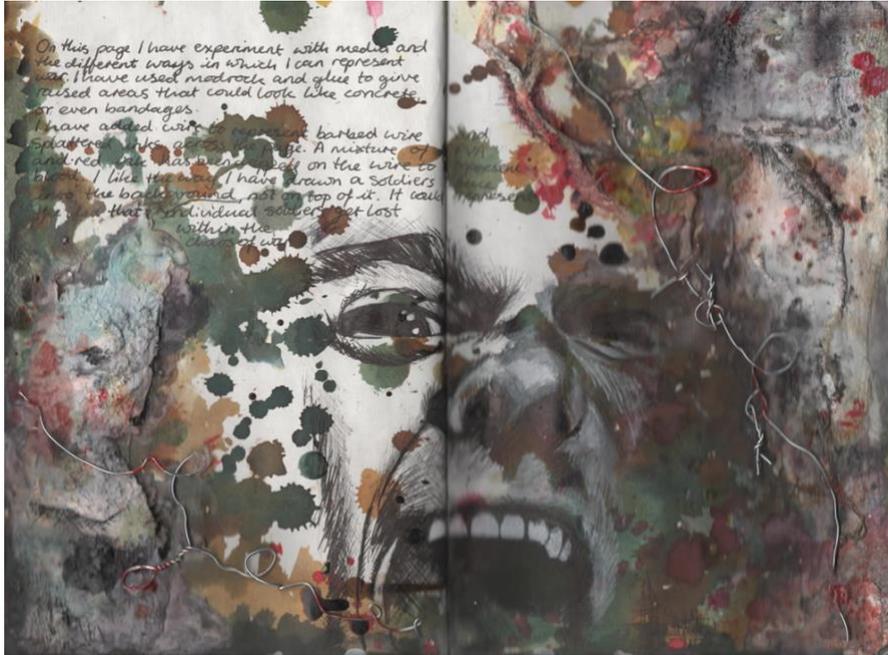


Note: Adapted from Student Art Guide, 2020 (<https://www.studentartguide.com/articles/art-sketchbook-ideas>).

Figure 6 is created with a plaster of paris bandage, glue in the elevated areas, wire, and ink. The mixed media piece is a work in progress as the student artist explores ideas through annotation and media. Belluigi (2013) explained that “creativity is promoted by conditions and activities which encourage playfulness, risk-taking and experimentation” and “when occurring during the process of artmaking, experimentation and play draw on the student’s whole personality, processes through which they gain a sense of “self” (p. 9). The ability to explore freely with materials, texture, and ideas allows for a greater artistic development outside of finalizing the piece towards a concrete final outcome.

Figure 6

Texture experiment in a sketchbook with layered materials



Note: Adapted from Student Art Guide, 2020 (<https://www.studentartguide.com/articles/art-sketchbook-ideas>).

While Figure 5 and 6 focus on several textural elements, Figure 7 focuses on one medium: coffee. The student artist's original enjoyment is watercolor and they decided to brew a variety of coffee to test the painting capabilities of the unusual material. In order to retrieve darker tones, the student added physical coffee grounds directly to the paper. The painting itself contains a broken figurative image with white break lines within the composition. The viewer's eyes easily flow from one part to the next as they retrieve all of the desired information from the multiple sections of the artwork.

While describing the piece, the student reflected on the idea of experimentation being a fun process, especially when it was with unknown materials.

Figure 7

Texture experiment with coffee and dynamic composition



Note: Adapted from Artsonia.com, n.d. (<https://www.artsonia.com/museum/art.asp?id=87767450>).

The final image, Figure 8, combines great skills of media exploration as well as concept. The student artist used Autodesk Sketchbook pro to draw and print the image, applied feathers and grapevine branches to complete the composition. While the

composition is centered, the image is still visually stunning due to the subtle physical texture and eye-catching lime colored background. The artist wanted to create an anxious and trapped feeling to illuminate the feelings during civil unrest. The image is a part of a developed series of visual image and idea exploration that shows inquiry and play with materials.

Figure 8

Texture experiment with concept and layering of materials



Note: Adapted from AP Central College Board, 2020 (<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/pdf/ap-2d-art-and-design-2020-sustained-investigation-sample-2-score-3333.pdf>).

Conclusion

With the general analysis of experimental texture art created by middle and high school students, there is evidence which shows that exploration of new media allows students to collect a library of media resources in order to create unique pieces of art. For middle school, experimentation might not be enough to create unpredictable results, but the exploration of new media guides students to keep investigating. Independent inquiry in art courses allows students to search for their own unpredictable materials and at the same time develop mindful artwork that goes beyond just investigation. In the end, with Covid-19 virtual teaching, students are required to experiment with uncommon materials they have at home to create their artwork which is great practice when it comes to developing ideas within the classroom.

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