

What should I Paint NOW?



A painting prime: For educators of young children.

Taking children on an artistic journey through painting.

Opening their eyes to the potential and creativity of painting.

By: Faige Kobre

Welcome to *What should I Paint Now?*

This guide is for children who need help in taking the next step in their painting activities. This is not a book teaching you to teach children how to be an artist. I am not an artist nor an art teacher. I am an early childhood educator with a passion for children's art.

As an educator who is very involved in children's art, I became aware of a specific problem that comes about when children do art. (Not all children, but many.)

They reach a plateau where they have difficulty coming up with ideas and motivations to take their painting to the next level. This often discourages them from painting further.

Over the past few years I tried out many activities with the children I work with to try to take them to the next level. I created this e book to help you help them get to the next level in their painting activities.

The activities in this book do not go overboard in teaching art concepts even though there are some to help them advance. Children that are highly motivated will go on to take advanced art classes where they will learn many of the skills they need to further their art knowledge, these ideas are just the tip of the iceberg..

Many of the activities are ways of getting kids to be creative in an abstract way. This is to counter the idea that many children have that art is only representational.

The images at the end of the book as in *Hooked on Collage* can be used as inspiration as I will explain by the specific activities.

The book begins by explaining to you (If you don't already know) the type of painting I use for all of these activities.

Children love painting and in school are used to easel painting.

This type of painting that I use can be done on any flat surface and is called tray painting, as it originated with an aluminum tray as a palette.

I discovered that using aluminum foil works just as well when I could not find non stick trays. They are also neater as you throw out the foil when done without having to wash out any trays.

This activity can be done at school with a few children or even at home with one child or more depending on your space and patience.

It can be done with large groups if you are very well prepared and I have actually done it with a group of 12 children at a time. (Not normally suggested)

If the children are really young and just starting out the most you should work with at a time would probably be 4 children.

The more experienced the children are with this type of painting the more children can do it at one time, as they don't need you to sit there making sure they have the technique down pat. There is no bulky easel therefore no dripping off of an easel, and is easy to clean up.

Tray painting is an excellent activity in helping children gain direction-following skills, color-mixing skills AND is a wonderful enhancement of fine motor skills besides the color mixing skills they develop.

The actual goal of tray painting as I will explain a bit later, is to have the children use the few colors they are given to mix any color they need on their aluminum foil. (Palette)

This activity needs a lot of supervision at first with young children since the directions can be confusing until they get the hang of it. For younger children (3-4 year olds), the supervision time will be longer than for older children (5- and up).

Below is a list of materials needed for this activity plus directions to run this activity

Materials needed:

- 1. A piece of aluminum foil**
- 2. 3 primary colors of paint plus white and black**(Younger children start with 3 primaries and I only give black to more experienced children)
- 3. One paintbrush**
- 4. A large container with water** (Make it large enough so that the brush does not allow it to tip over and it should hold enough water so they the water doesn't get muddy too quickly)
- 5. A sponge** (Used to dry the brush. If you don't have a sponge you can use a wad of paper towels)
- 6. Small tops of baby food jars to hold the paint** (You can use anything else that you find that will hold small amount of paints. This way if they mix up the colors it is easy to just wash out and begin again)
- 7. Piece of paper** (Make it large enough so the children can work comfortably)

Directions:



All of the items for this painting activity go on or near the aluminum foil.

Place the small baby food jar lids with the paint on the foil. (Or on table next to the paper) Place the sponge and the cup of water with a brush in it near the child(ren)

Give the children the following directions:

1. Dip the brush in one of the paint filled lids
2. Use to paint on the paper.
3. When you are ready for a new color wash the brush in the can of water (press bush on bottom of cup to get paint off)and then press it on the sponge to remove excess water.
4. Go on to the next color and repeat the process
5. When the child wants to try to mix two colors, s/he follows the same process. They just have to remember the correct order.
6. Put the first color on the aluminum foil wash brush, dry, take some of a different color, put that on top of previous color which is already on the foil. Mix. Take the mixed color and use on the paper.

The goal is for children to reach a mature enough stage and enough experience to be able to decide which color they need for their picture and mix it on their foil (or palette) for use on their paper. As in *“I think I need pink...how do I make that”*.

In Reality . . .

The children are usually so fascinated by the mixing process at first that they often forget to transfer the colors to the paper. Or, they just forget about

making a picture and just paint a whole bunch of mixed colored circles onto their paper. If they do this long enough, they will learn to use the color mixing as a tool.

The beauty of doing this in a home school environment is that they will be doing this consistently year in and year out and they really learn to use the foil as a real palette. If you are working in a traditional school environment it would be great if the children get to do this year after year.

In a regular school where you do not have teachers following the same type of curriculum each year, the children do not get the full benefit of this activity by allowing it to progress year by year.

Younger children will take longer to get to the mixing for a purpose stage. That's OK! Let the children enjoy the activity, learn to properly follow directions and learn how different colors combine to make new colors.

By using **only** primary colors they learn that these few colors make almost any color combination.

Try to control yourself from telling them which colors to mix to make a specific color because there is no knowledge that sticks like that learned on one's own thru experimentation. Of course if they are working with other children they will help each other.

The only thing you need to do is assist them in following the directions for how to paint. There is no need to get upset if they put their paintbrush in the wrong color because you use so little that you can just wash the small paint container out and add new color.

Many of the activities that I use in this book were taken from a few different sources, plus my own experience. However I must say that many of them do come from the book *Children and Painting* by Cathy Weisman Topal. If you want to take the painting activities further than I do then you can buy her book and see how much further she goes.

She also works with many ages elementary students while my focus is on Early Childhood.

Before I begin I want to share with you a poem that I received many years ago from a workshop I took.

It is called ***The Painting*** and is really what painting can and should be all about until they on their own want to move on.

THE PAINTING

A wonderful poem for parents elucidating why their children's paintings often come home looking the way they do

By Helen Buckley

Once a little boy was going to paint a picture
He put the paper on the easel
And he looked at all the jars of colors in front of him.
"What are you going to paint?" asked the teacher.
"The sky," said the little boy.
"I am going to paint the sky."
"Good," said the teacher,
"Do you have enough blue paint?"
"Yes," said the little boy.
And he took up the blue brush
and made a wide band across the top of the paper.
"There," he said. "There is the blue sky".
And he looked around for the teacher,
But she had gone.

Then the little boy looked out of the window
To see if his sky looked like the real one.
And it did.
But was the sky ALWAYS blue?
The little boy put down the blue brush
and thought about the sky.
"Sometimes," he thought, "Just before night,
the sky is pink - and a little purple."
So he took up his pink brush
and then the purple,
and pretty soon there was a sunset on his paper.

Then the little boy remembered winter,
and how the sky looks when the snow comes down.
So he took up his white brush
and made soft snowflakes all over
the blue and the pink and the purple sky.
And some of the snowflakes melted
to make more colors and the little boy felt happy
like he always did when the snow came down
in the wintertime.

And just as he was about to put down his brush
and be finished, he remembered a day in the summer
when the sky grew dark
And he remembered that he had been a little scared,
and he had to run and tell his mother about it.
So now he took up the black brush

and painted great storm clouds
with flashes of red and orange lightning
streaking through them.
“It’s thundering, too,” said the little boy softly to himself,
“Boom! Boom! Boom! And the wind is blowing!
And he made the rain come down -- hard rain --
In long green lines across the sky
and all the colors ran together in rainbows
at the bottom of his page

“Now I will make the sun shine,”
said the little boy to himself,
and he made a big, round sun in the middle of the paper.
But the painting was so wet
and there were so many colors in it
that the yellow sun turned brown in the sky
But the little boy didn’t care --
His picture was finished
and it was just the way he wanted it.

He looked around for the teacher,
and pretty soon she was there
Standing by the easel and looking at all the colors
All the blue and the pink and the purple
All the white and the black
All the red and the orange and green
And the yellow that had turned brown.
The teacher looked at all the wet and dripping colors
which had run together
in the snow and the wind and the rain
of the little boy’s painting.

And she said “My goodness!”
“I thought you were going to make the sky!”
“I did,” said the little boy,
“I made all the skies I know about.”
And he took his picture off the easel
and put it carefully away to dry.

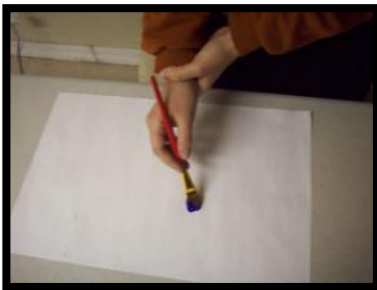
Painting Exercises

Different parts of the arm produce different types of paint marks



These pictures are for you to show the children the different parts of the body we use when we paint and how the marks come out differently when we paint from our shoulders upper arm, wrist or fingers.

Start by giving them one color and try painting using different parts of their arms to make different kinds of lines



Beginning to Paint

The first step would be for you to just let the children paint whatever they want. Trying out the techniques and getting the sensory experience of painting. Young children will just paint mushes as you see below as they experiment while older children will make things like houses, flowers and of course rainbows and hearts. (Refer to the poem above)

It would be a very good idea to introduce the children to abstract art (of which I have a few images in the back of this book) which makes them less focused on representational work and feel good about what they can do

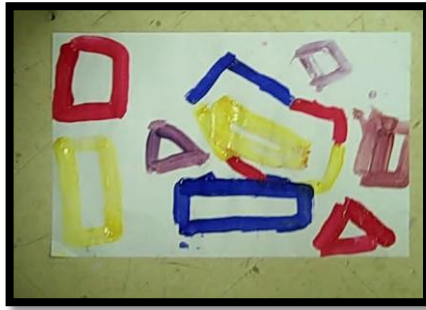


Outlines and Blobs

Shapes are either outlines or full shapes that are like blobs.

Children should be shown the different ways of making shapes. An outlined edges around a shape and a blob is a filled in shape.

Have them create various shapes in both forms. Either as a separate activity or one after the other



In this activity below the children had to create shapes of different colors and then completely cover the whole paper with paint leaving only one empty white space. You can create your own challenges like: Make 2 blobs and 3 outlines shapes. Or make one large outline shape and one blob inside of it etc.



Using the colors

Once the children have gotten into the swing of their shapes and are comfortable with the mixing you can start giving them color challenges.

How many different colors can you get from your available paint colors ?



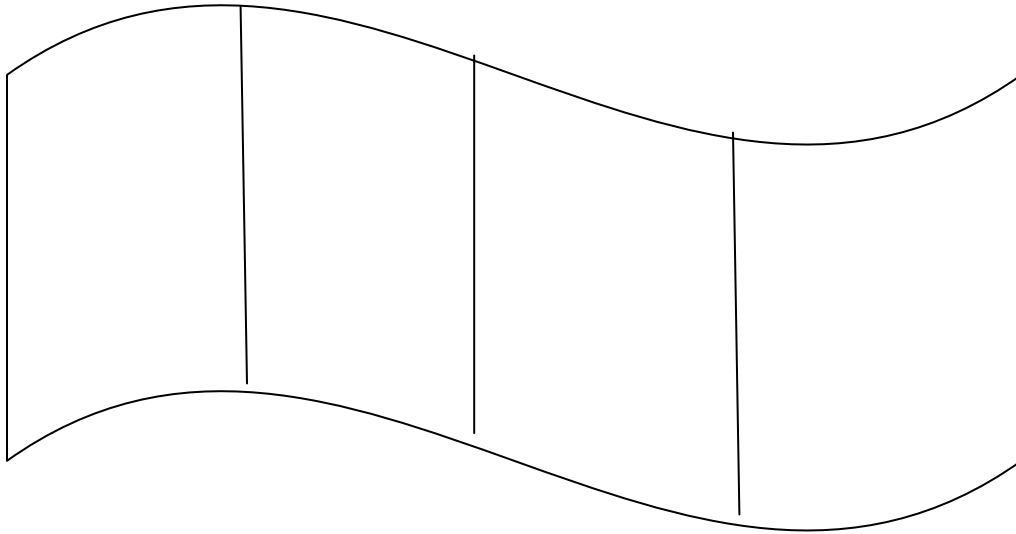
And

How many hues can you get from one color?

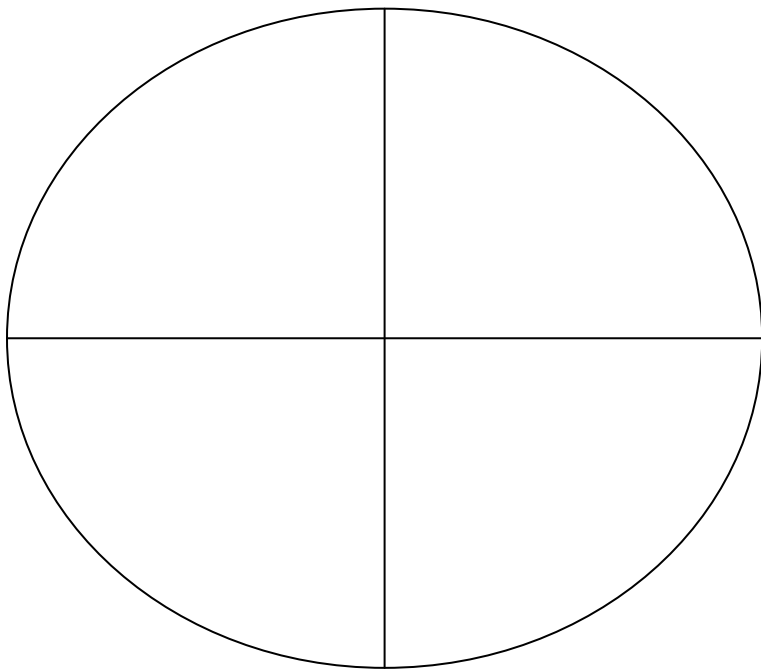


In order to do activities like the ones above you can either have them do it as the first child above did it filling up the whole paper or you can create circles and other shapes as templates to fill as the second example shows.

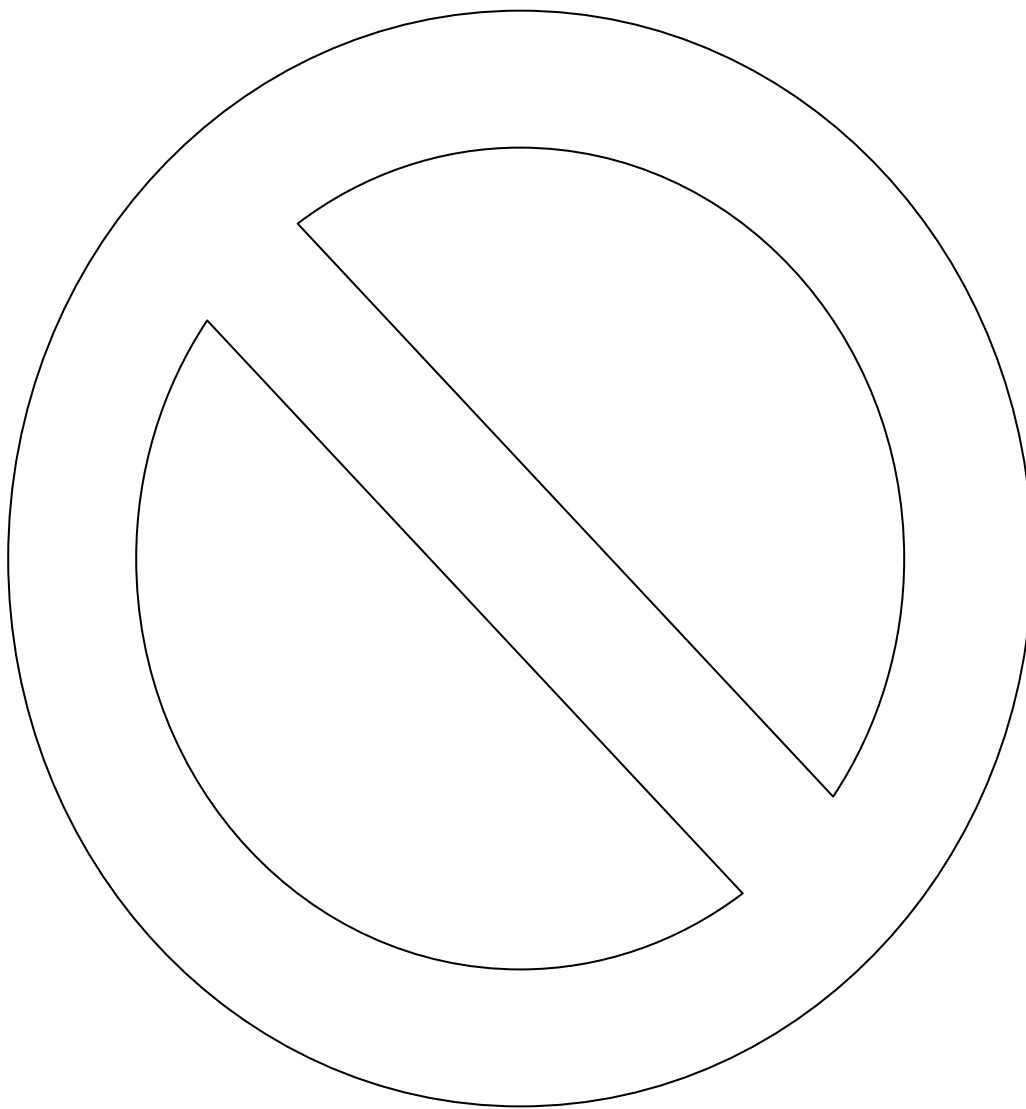
Here are some templates you can use if you feel that your children need more structure



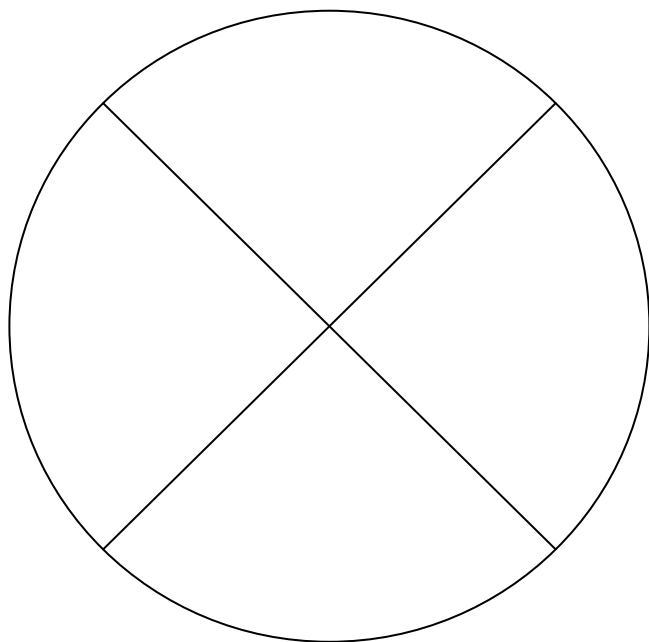
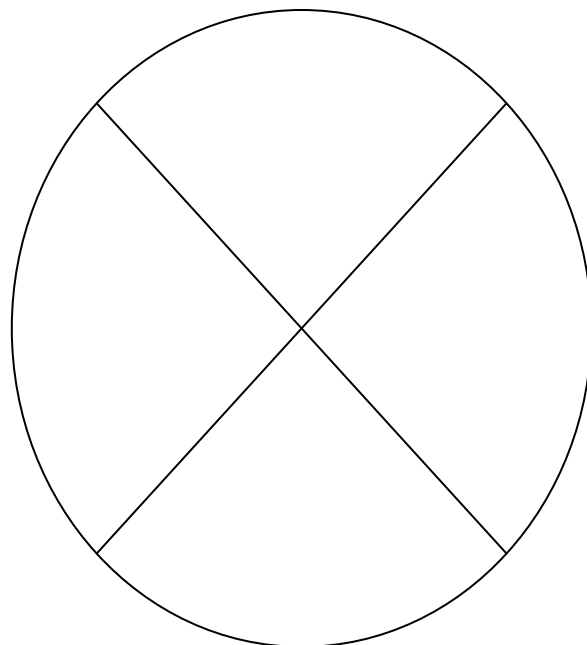
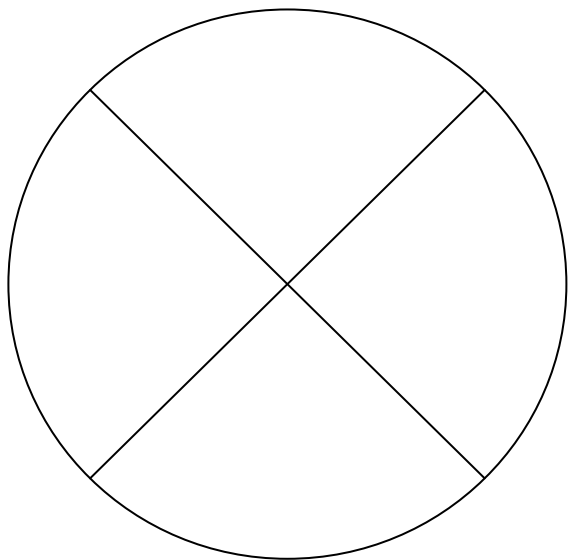
- How many hues can you get from one color
- What colors can you get by mixing only blue or yellow or red with other colors
- Use your brush indifferent directions in each empty spot to create different brush marks
- In each section make marks using different parts of your arm



Use 2 or 3 colors that look really nice together to fill up this shape. Only change colors when you move to different outline.



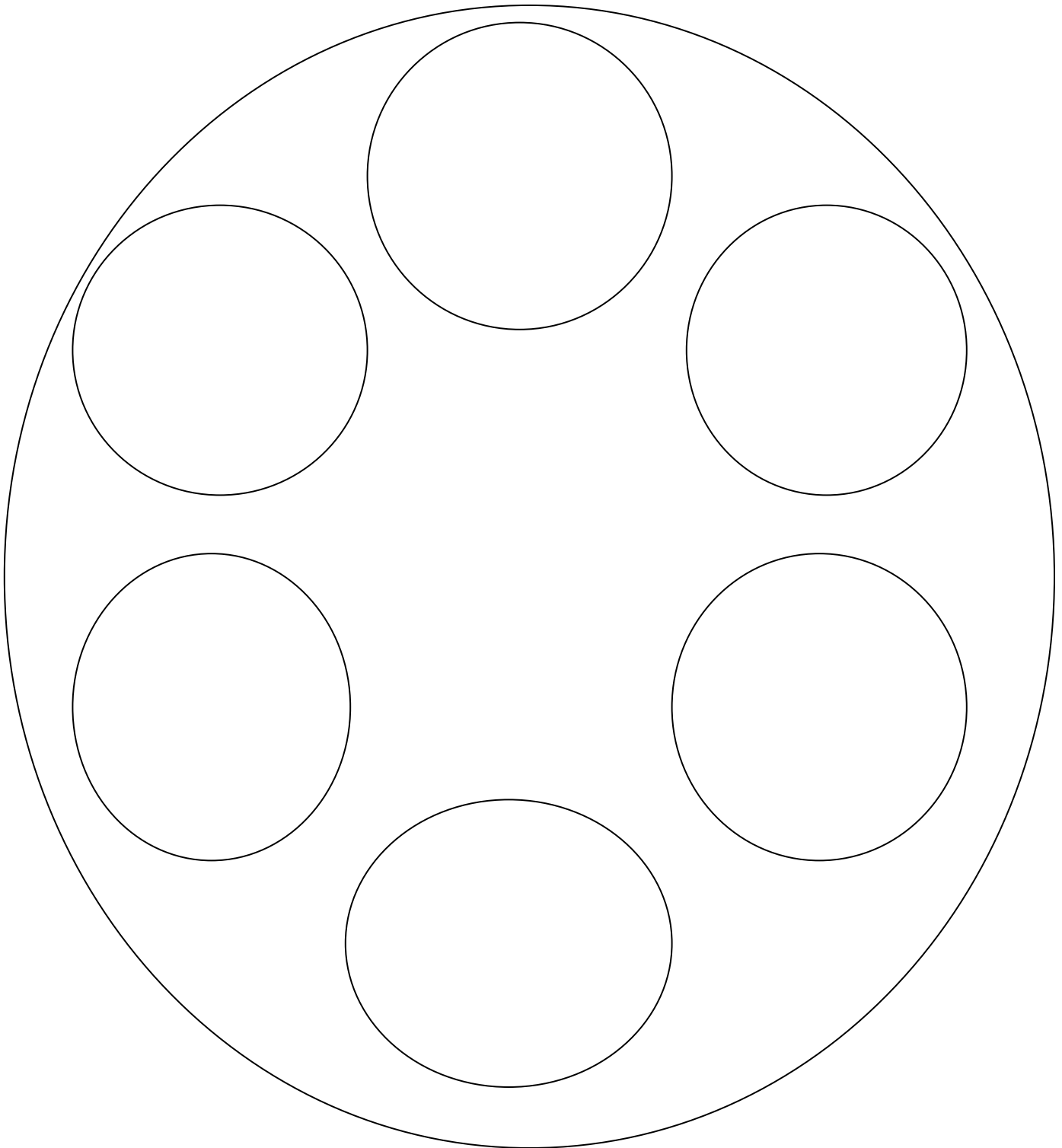
**Use Red, Yellow and Blue, one for each circle.
Each circle one should have only one of the primary colors
and the variations that that color can make.**



Making a Color Wheel

The children can make a very basic color wheel. This color wheel will help them in their mixing activities and in learning some very basic art concepts about color.

You can use this template or just copy it onto a thicker material. This color wheel is a very basic one using only 6 colors.



Begin by having the children put each of the primary colors in alternating circles. I read in art book that magenta works better than real red and turquoise works better than blue. I tried it when we made these color wheels and didn't see that it was such an important difference. I think either variation is fine.

Have the children mix each of the two colors that are next to each other onto their aluminum "tray" and put that color in between the two colors that created it.



If you notice on the left color wheel near the violet and near the orange are two dabs of similar color. That was because I tried the magenta and the turquoise as well as the regular red and blue and wanted to see how much purer the magenta and turquoise were. You can see the differences yourself.

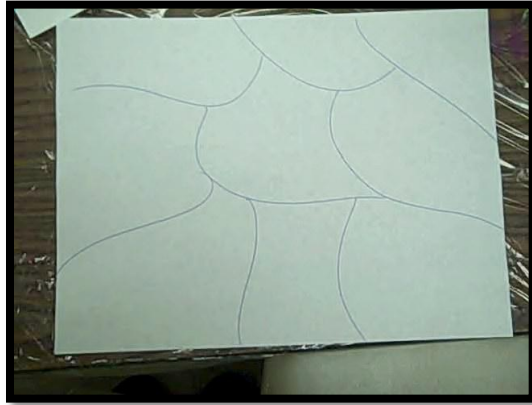
The point of a color wheel for such young children is to teach them some very basic concepts

- Primary colors
- Secondary colors
- Which colors when combined will make a third color
- Contrasting or complementary colors

It is only a beginning. If they take more advanced art classes they will learn a more detailed color wheel.

Painting Primary Colors

Give children some kind of template either like the one I created below or one of the ones that I created in this guide and have them paint in the different shapes using only the primary colors.



When they are done with that then have them paint **only** secondary colors in a similar template. They should look on their color wheel to see which colors are secondary.(colors opposite from each other on the color wheel)



Contrasting colors

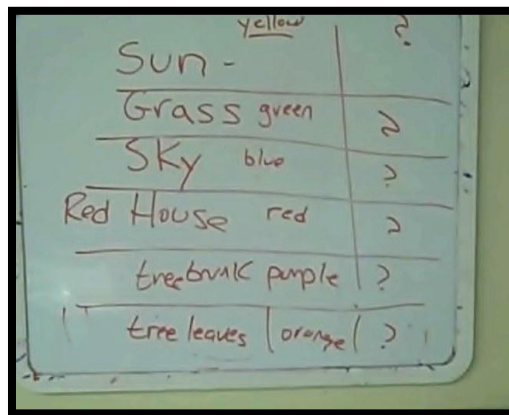
or as they are called....**Complementary colors**

This is a fun activity to get the children to understand the concept a bit.

Tell the children that they are to make a typical picture which is to include a house, the sun, tree, grass etc but instead of using the real colors they need to use the OPPOSITE colors of what they are realistically.

What I did in this case was to write the objects on the white board that they were going to make and wrote next to it the color that that object normally is. This made it easier for them to focus.

If your children cannot read at all, it may work to put a tiny dot of that color next to the object instead.



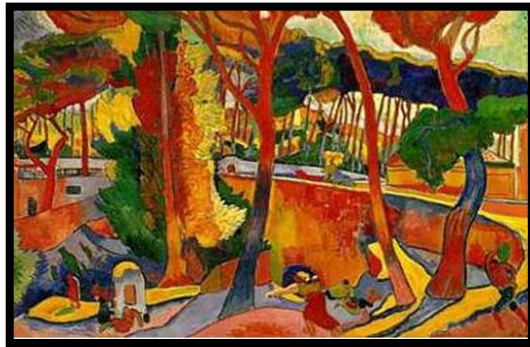
This activity is purely for the sake of learning about contrasting colors and children should know that you don't usually dictate to them what pictures to make.

You may want to have them draw the objects before they paint as it's not such a free flowing painting activity they are normally used to.

One child was so unhappy about having to create a picture with the WRONG colors that she put a big x over it after she was done.



This activity may be the perfect opportunity to introduce *Fauvism* to children. They can learn that certain artists like in Fauvism don't always use color realistically and here is one sample by an artist named Andre Derain whose picture can certainly illustrate that concept quite well. (Larger copy in back)



Below are the children's results from this activity.



Making Brown

I don't always leave children's results up to experimentation and this is one activity where I don't.

Invariable the children end up asking ask how to make brown. I do tell them to experiment, but when they get frustrated, I tell them to take out their color wheels and to ***mix any 2 complementary colors***

Using any one of the previous templates or free form, have the children create as many different shades of brown as they can.



Composition

Mirror paintings
Pattern paintings
Stripe paintings

Composition is usually the way all the different parts of a painting like shapes, and colors values and lines are arranged in their artwork.

Planning a composition makes children think and plan on how to organize their picture.

I have 3 activities here that concentrate on different parts of composition.

The first one gives them an idea of symmetry.

You may want to use some of the images I have at the end of this book that show mirror images to give them an idea of what a mirror image is.

Give the children large sheets of paper. Fold them in half to begin and then unfold. The best way to start with a mirror image is to have them make some sort of face.

Explain to them that whatever goes on one side goes on the opposite side either the exact same or facing each other. Another easier option would be to just paint on ones side and then fold it over but this is a better exercise for them.



Of the second composition activity I have only one sample.

I gave the children large pieces of paper folded into 8 and then unfolded to make sections.

I told them to pick an object to paint in one of the squares and then to repeat it as exactly as they could in all of the squares.

Most of the children found it repetitive and did not want to do it.

It is a good skill for children to repeat the patterns and for them to try to remember how they created each one so they can repeat it.



Composition activity number 3 was stripe paintings.

These paintings are a good way for them to learn balance and they had to do a different task for each kind of painting. The children actually had a fun time doing these.

These were some of the instructions they got in doing these strip paintings.

- Use 2 colors and do thick stripes and thin stripes
- Use any colors you want to make stripes on the paper going 2 different directions
- Make stripes going in 3 directions
- Use only secondary colors to make stripes
- Make only diagonal stripes
- Use one color with different hues and make 3 different thickness of strips
- Use one black stripe only in your stripe painting

You can use your own creativity to come up with more ideas. I had them paint on smaller shapes for interest and if you do so they children can take all of these small paintings and create a collage out of them.



Texture Paintings

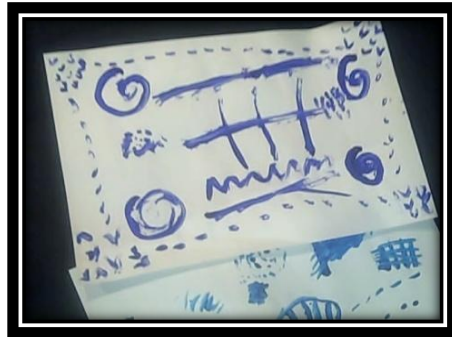
Creating texture in drawing and in painting is something that I always personally found difficult. It's a pretty advanced concept as well but the main idea is that repeating many different lines close together gives an illusion of texture.

I collected a few items that had obvious texture for the children to see and feel.
A sponge, pine cone, toothbrush, bark, and sandpaper.



We felt them and looked at the different patterns. We then experimented trying to make small dots and short lines all close together to see if we could get the illusion of texture.

Personally this is not one of my favorite activities and if I was an artist maybe I could get more excited about this. Below are some attempts.



Weather Paintings

Another attempt to use lines to show something other than houses and trees.

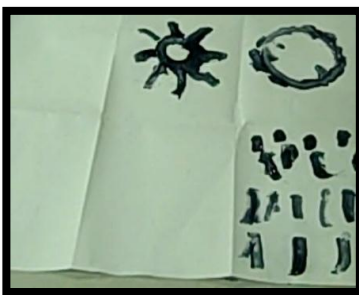
I tried to show the children how we can see different types of weather by the types of lines we use. First we made a chart together talking about heavy rain and wind and snow and tornados and tried to depict those with black lines



Then I gave them black paint and had them try it themselves. This is one child's efforts.



Below were others. You can give the children large papers folded and then opened into separate sections and have them make different weather situations as they see fit. Don't get too aggravated if most of them find it hard.



Value paintings

Learning about shades of gray

Learning about lines and weather brings you right into sky pictures which leads to value. The children have already experimented with making different shades and hues from their primary colors. It's now time to expand their horizons to gray.

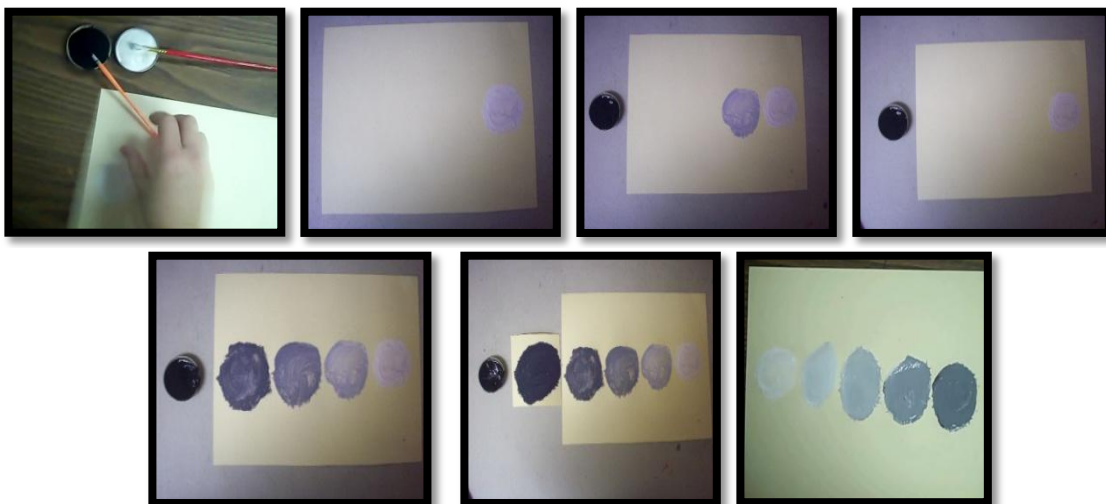
You can begin by hanging up cloud pictures and showing them how many different shades of gray there are. You can use the pictures I have in the back of this book under storm pictures, and if you print them out in black and white it doesn't matter that much as you can see only tones of gray anyway.



You may want to begin by first letting them try some mixing on their own using only black and white paint. You can then try to show them how to make different shades of gray by continuously adding very tiny bits of black to additional white circle that you make.

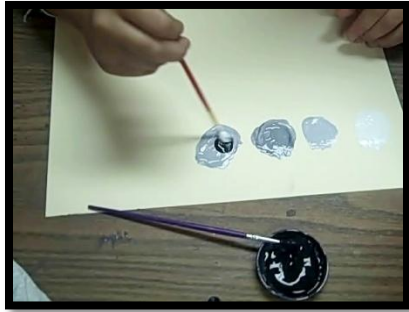
At the end they will have between 4-7 shades starting with white and ending with black and will depend on how much patience they have.

Below is a sample of what I did first to show the children the concept and idea



You can then have the children try the same activity so they can see how many shades of gray they can get.

Here are some results. Don't expect any kind of perfect circles unless you use homemade templates of course.



Then they were told to make sky pictures that were very gray and cloudy. This was the first step in teaching them that not all skies are a blue strip at the top of the paper and that a sky can take up a whole page



Sunset pictures

After gray value paintings that depict skies, you can move into sunset pictures. The children learn even more how skies are all different colors, not only blue.

The images I show them (many at the end of this book) also show how much of the paper the sky can take up.

For the sunset pictures I gave them red, yellow and white (in this case we used magenta)



One child first had to try out all the different shades she could get from these colors before making a sky



One interesting that happened from this was that one child when making a collage in a different activity realized that she now knew how to make different skies. She then asked if she could add painted skies onto her collages pictures. (which is seen below)



Below is a previous painting this child had done before doing the above exercises.



Horizon Lines

This is a concept that I had started on earlier to get children to get away from the standard blue line across the sky and to really see landscapes. I am trying to expand their painting and viewing skills and want them to notice how much space skies can take up in different pictures.

The object here is to try to get children to see which parts of the picture is background, middle ground and foreground.

It's a hard concept but I show them lots of pictures and there are many you can use from the back of this book where you can show over and over again how the picture is divided up into different spaces.

It is amazing how much of the picture is often the sky.

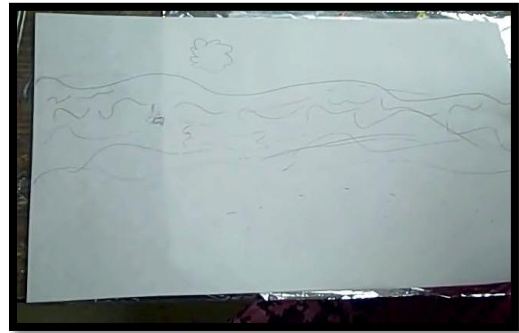
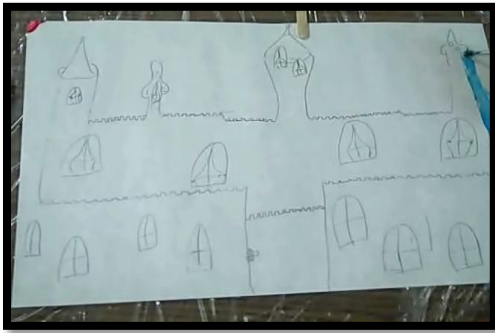
It opens their eyes to see that a picture can totally comprise of buildings without even showing the sky and it makes them much more aware of their surroundings.



I told them to do a landscape picture covering the entire paper with color.

Using the concept that they now knew they had to decide how much of their picture will be sky and foreground, what time of day it is in the sky, how much foreground and what will be in the middle.

Some of the children decided to do their pictures in pencil first.



Interestingly enough after all the experimentations with the different skies most of the children still chose to make their skies bright blue.

I guess it takes a while for the children to start thinking like artists.

Negative Space

Negative space is the last of the concepts that I introduced to the children and is used more in drawing activities but I will just touch upon it briefly.

We show the children that the words paint are the positive space and the paint around it is the negative space but notice how it also write the word paint.

You can try an activity like that using the children names cut out.



I actually did 2 small negative space painting activities to try to show what it is. We put 3 coins on a paper and said they are positive shapes. The kids painted around them then took off the coins and saw the negative shapes

We then did the same thing with a piece of yarn.



This is really a concept that needs a lot of reminding but its an interesting way for children to start looking at objects and their paintings.

Motivations

Once the children have conquered the activities in this e book they will most likely be comfortable with many of the motivations that are listed below. These are motivations for children who are still saying *What Should I paint Now* and just need some ideas to get their creative juices flowing.

- **How would you paint yourself if you were lost in a big city?**
- **How would you paint a storm?**
- **How would you paint a summer day?**
- **What reminds you of happiness?**
- **Repeat a color in your painting 3 times**
- **Paint a sky at the airport.**
- **Paint a busy harbor**
- **Paint a rainy day scene**
- **Paint a city at night**
- **Think of something tiny and paint it large**
- **Paint a picture of the favorite thing you did on vacation**
- **Paint a favorite place as if you were looking at it from an airplane.**

For children who want to paint something like an airplane, a house a boat or anything else that is stopping them, the thing to do is stop and talk to them.

Ask them what shapes the item is, to draw it in the air and then put that shape down on their paper. They can then continue to talk about what the item has and to add it to their picture. It is amazing what children are capable of when given a little bit of guidance.

You can of course also give them pictures for inspiration but always make sure to give many pictures of the same item so they don't feel that that it is the only way to make anything. The sky is now the limit for them to feel more confidence in painting until they decide they want more formal classes.

Happy painting

Images for inspiration

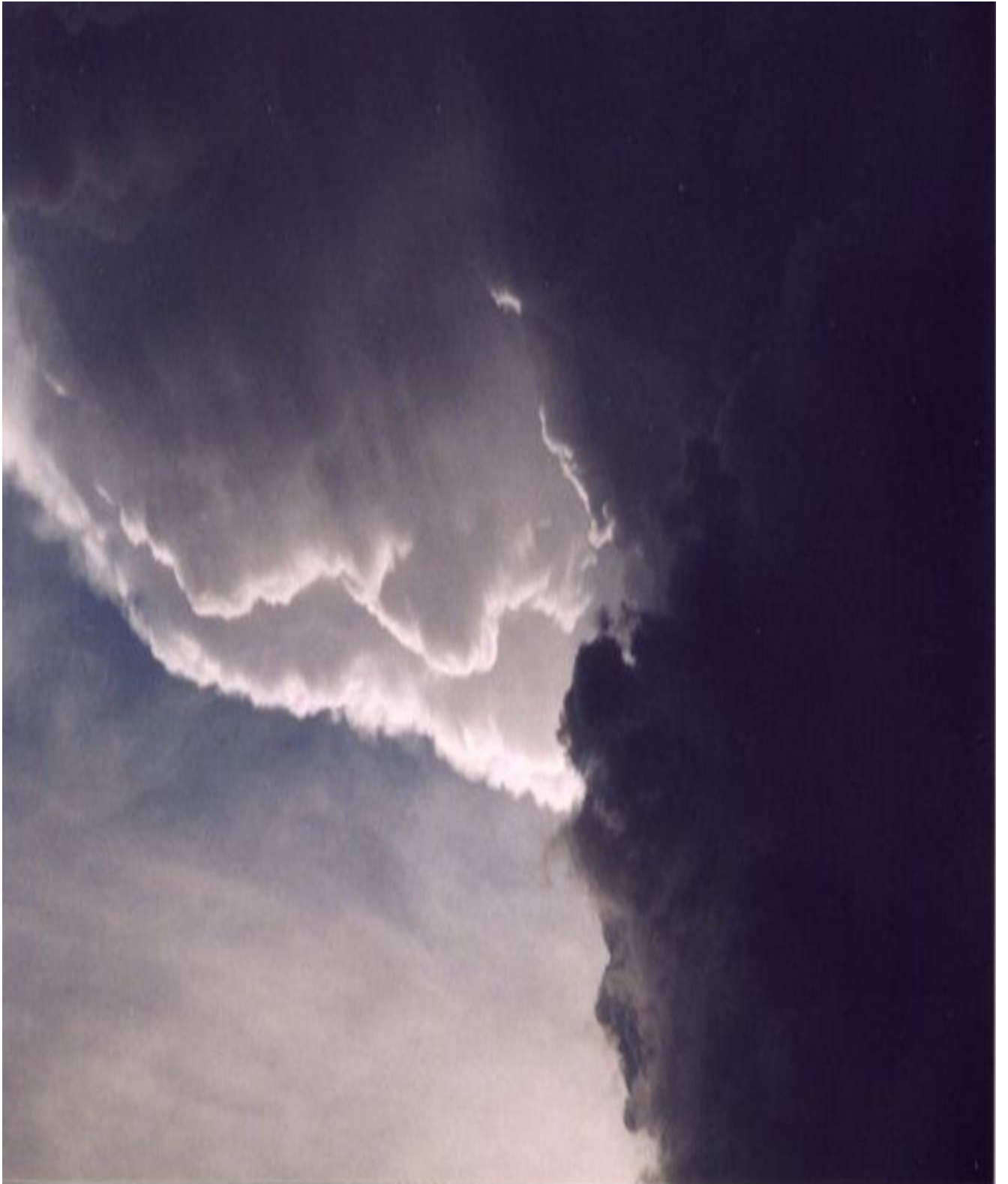
For the activities below

(You can use the photographs for all different inspirations, these are just what I collected for these activities but they are in no way limited to them)

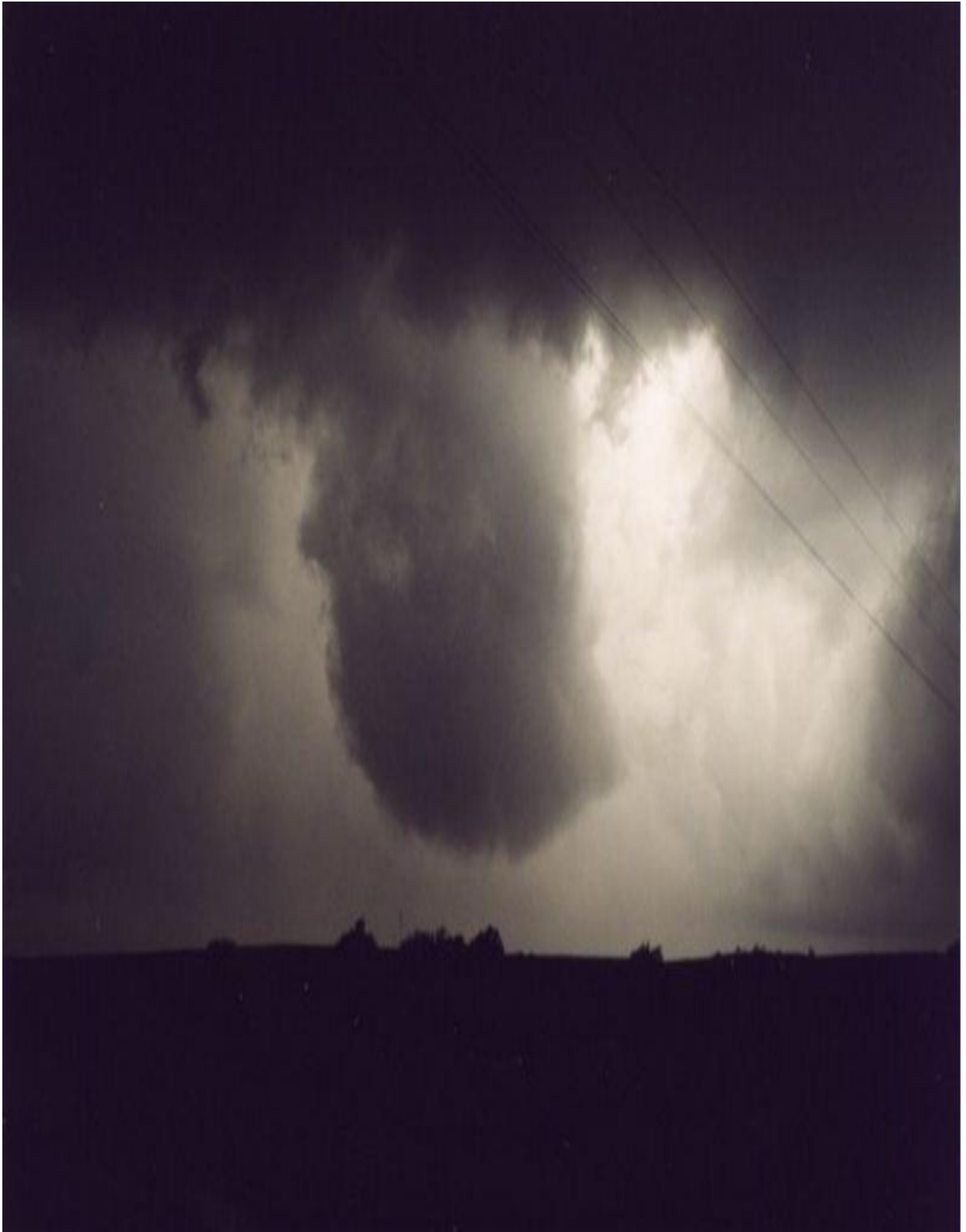
- **Gray clouds(value paintings)**
 - **Sunsets**
- **City scenes for horizon lines**
 - **Mirror images**
 - **Abstract Art**

Gray Night and Storm clouds



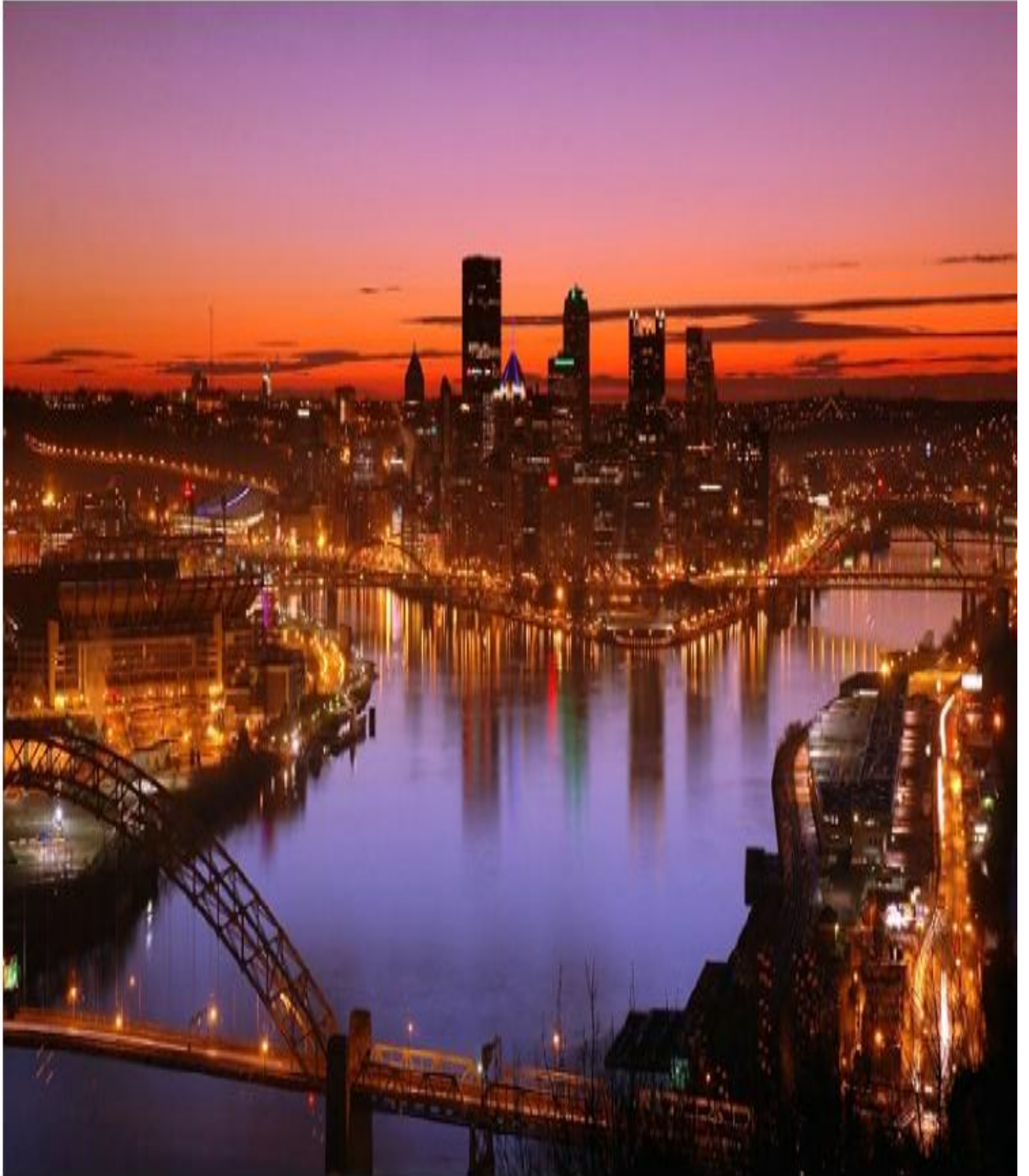


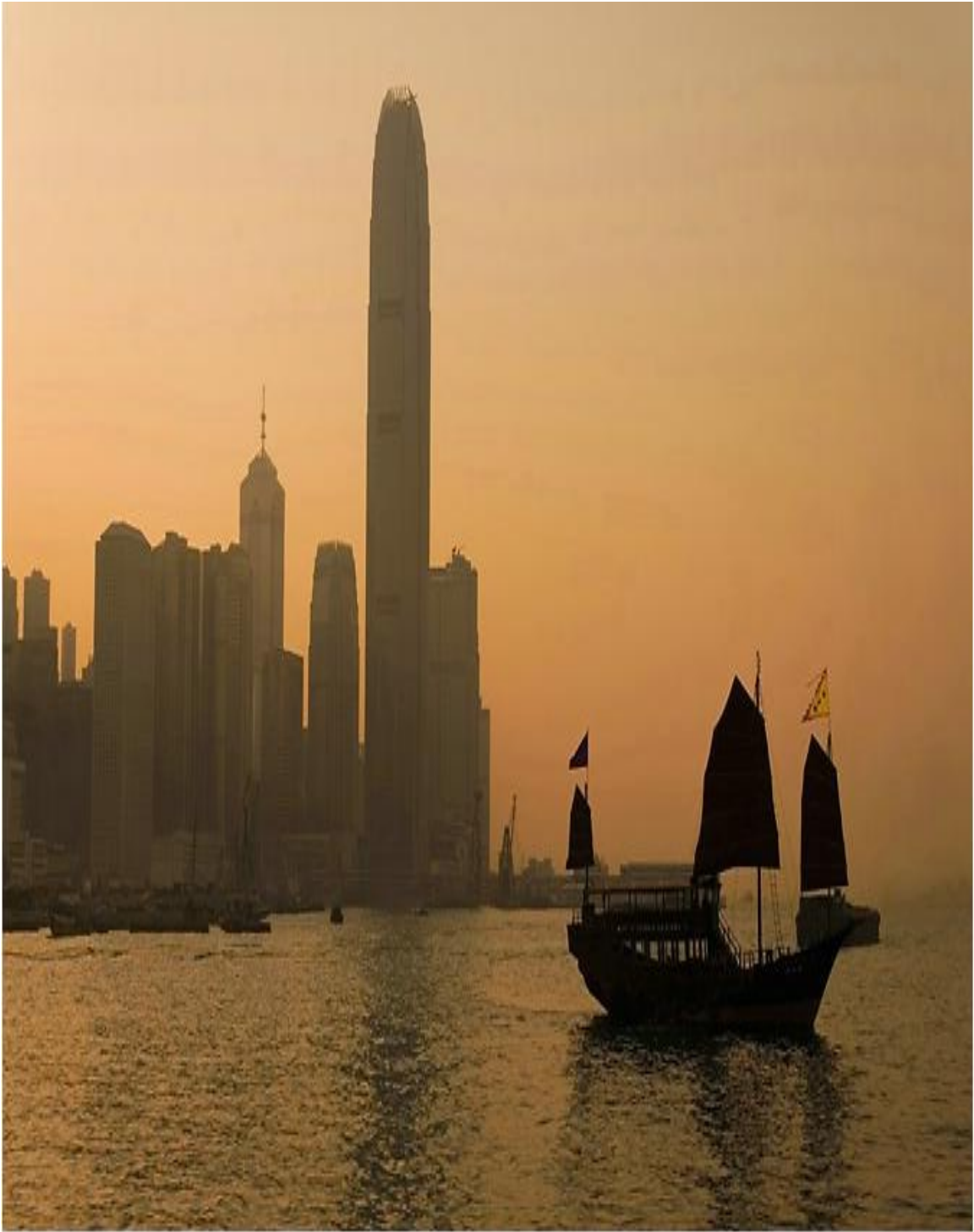






Sunsets







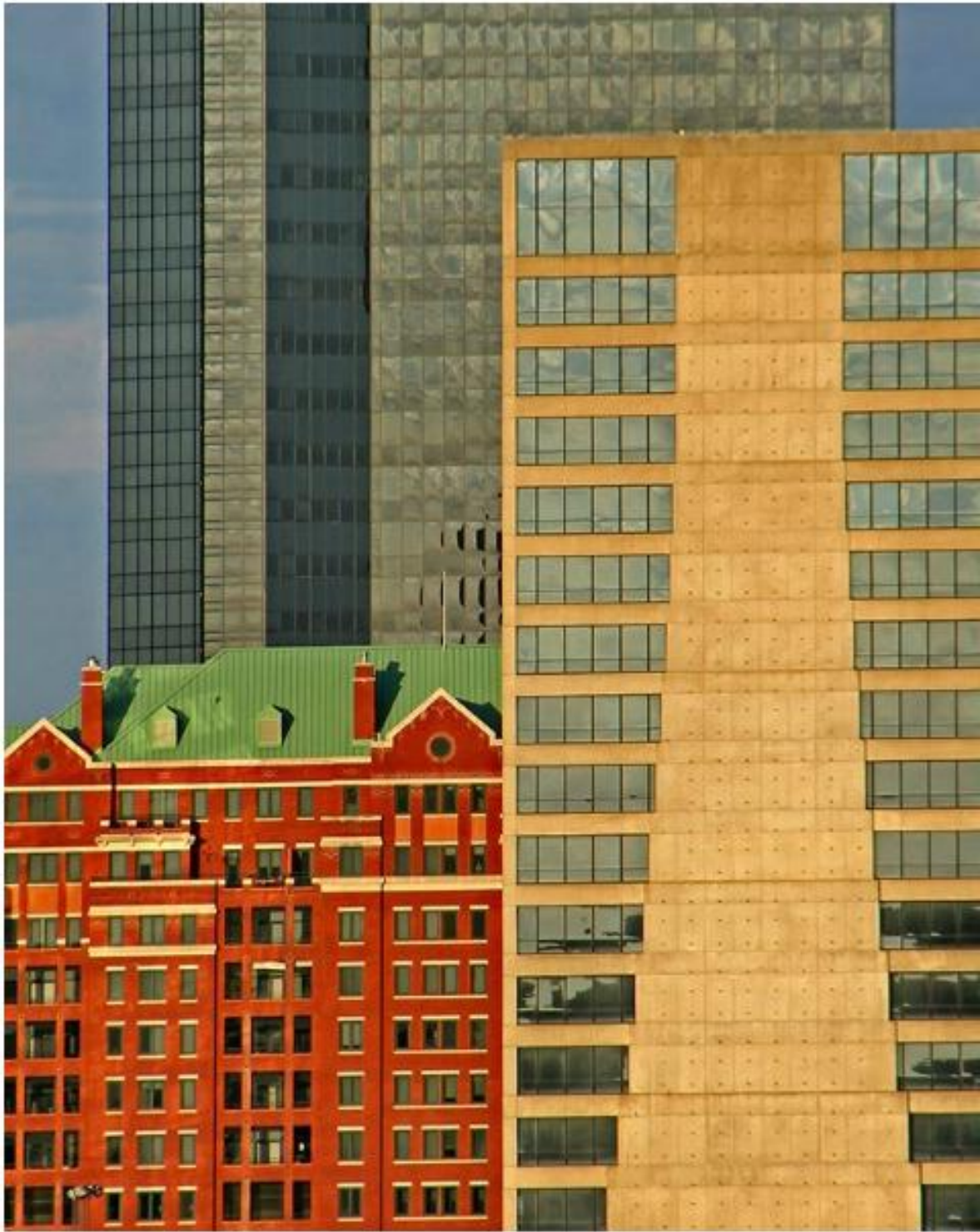






City scenes /Horizon lines

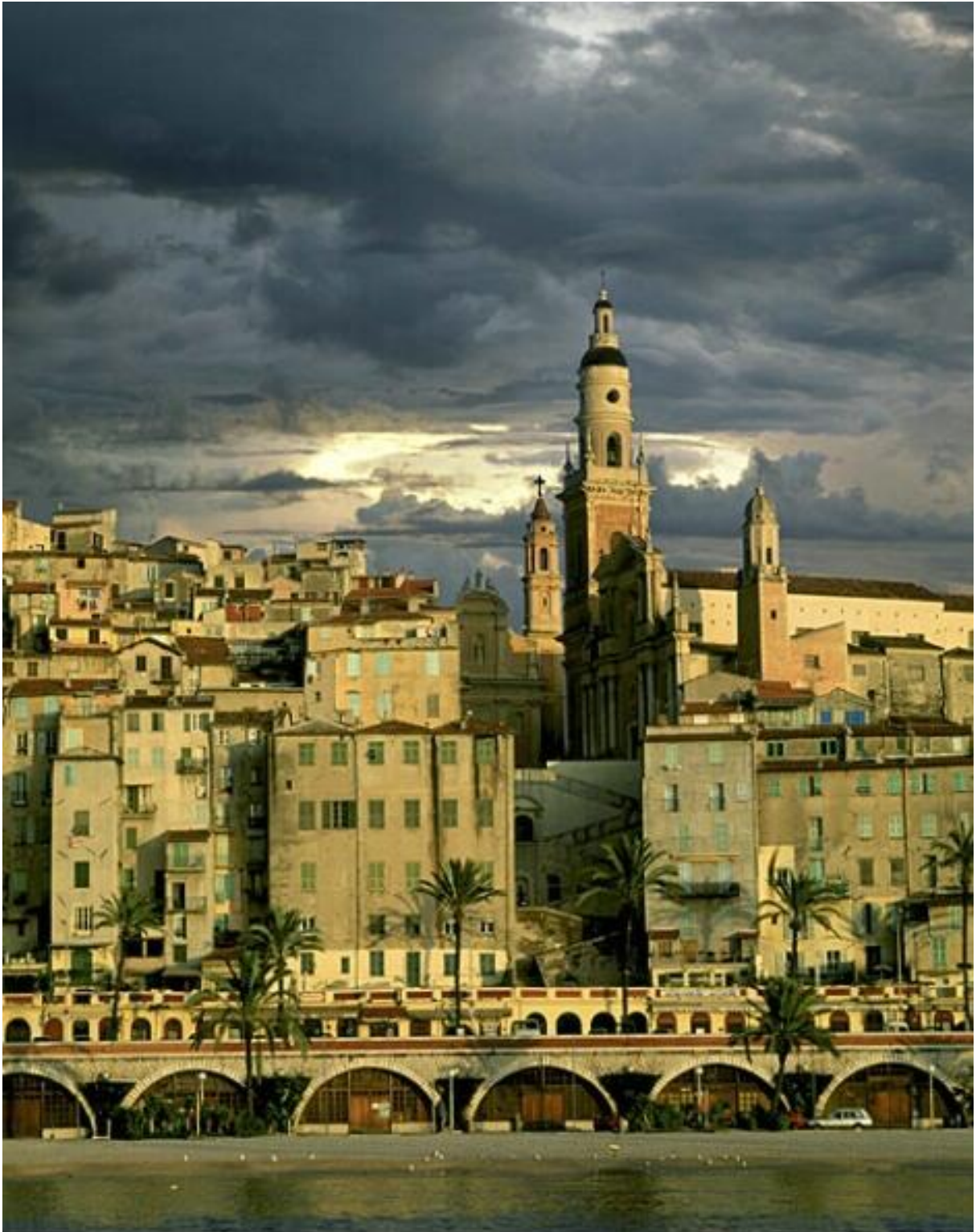












Mirror Images











Abstract Art







