

Gettin' Jazzy with Rizzi Birds

by Josey M. Brouwer



Haven



Skyla



Mason



Tessa

My first-grade artists love to paint, and when I greet them at the art-room door wearing my paint-spattered lab coat, they know they are in for a *fabulous* 50 minutes!

OUR STUDY OF AMERICAN POP ARTIST JAMES RIZZI began early in the school year and was a perfect opportunity to practice and review painting techniques that would ensure a well crafted and successful project for each student.

Rizzi's brightly colored artwork, filled with simple images of birds, cars and buildings, is perfect for encouraging student discussion about art. I like to give students time to talk about an artist before we move to creating a project. Exploring and sharing ideas together is an important part of the art-making process, and I am always amazed at the connections and discoveries that are sparked during student art discussions.

My first graders like to play a game called "I See, I Think, I Wonder" when we begin looking at artwork. "I see a bird, I think it is a duck, I wonder how many more birds I can find!" helps my students focus on an artist's work and begin diving deeper into an art piece.

They quickly noticed the many symbols Rizzi uses in his art, and came up with some perceptive ideas about why he placed hearts, peace signs, and sun symbols in his art. "It's to make his art look happy and make people feel good, Mrs. B.!" I couldn't have said it better myself!

I PLACED A RIZZI ART REPRODUCTION at each table (Rizzi calendar pages, separated and laminated, are a great art resource for this project) and asked my students to talk about their piece with their table partners. As I circu-



< Jaxon, Kaleb and Lawson discuss an artwork by James Rizzi.

▼ Nicole



lated around the room, first-graders were looking for different symbols in their art piece, wondering about the smiling people Rizzi had placed in the building windows, and even making lists of objects they were seeing.

After five minutes, we came back together at the easel and drew pictures of the symbols that the students found in Rizzi's artwork on a large sheet of paper.

NATIONAL ART STANDARDS

- **CREATE:** Demonstrate quality craftsmanship through care for and use of materials, tools, and equipment.
- **RESPOND:** Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Primary-level students will ...

- talk about the work of artist James Rizzi.
- learn watercolor painting techniques and the proper handling of art materials.
- create art pieces in the style of Rizzi that include their own symbols.

MATERIALS

- Photos of James Rizzi's art
- 9" x 12" heavyweight tagboard
- Watercolors, small and large paintbrushes
- Permanent markers
- Squares of colored paper (2" x 2")
- Scissors, white glue
- 15" x 12" black construction paper

LESSON MOTIVATION

There are two primary goals for this project:

1. To encourage first-grade artists to discuss the artwork of James Rizzi.
2. To focus on painting techniques.

We wrapped up our first class by learning how to draw a Rizzi bird on 9" x 12" tagboard. After watching me draw a sample bird, students were given an option to draw their bird by themselves or to follow along with me as I drew and projected the image on the screen.

Since this was their first big drawing project of the year, most students chose to draw with me and finish on their own when they felt ready to move on.

Many drew two birds—one on each side of their paper—and then chose their best one to trace over with black permanent marker, using an extra wide marker to draw a large heart around their finished bird.

EXCITEMENT FILLED THE ROOM when we met for our next class. It was time to paint! Aprons were slipped on, sleeves rolled up, and students erased their pencil lines and finished outlining their birds with black markers while I passed out the painting materials. And then ... a big deep breath to calm ourselves and get our brains ready to paint!

Tip: Pass out all the supplies except for the paintbrushes. When the class is calm and focused, the brushes come out and students are ready to paint.

I kept the painting demonstration simple for first-graders, talking through the important points as I began painting a sample bird:

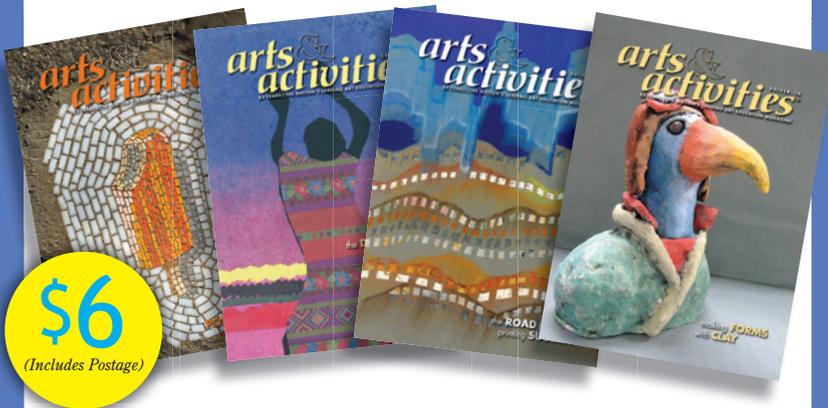
1. Always start with yellow, the color that can change the quickest and get "muddy" if your brush and water is not clean.
2. Rinse, rinse, rinse your brush and blot it on a paper towel before you move to orange, red, and your darker colors.

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RIZZI

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3. Not sure if your brush is clean enough? Try tickling it on your wrist—if your wrist is still clean, then you can try your next color!
4. Hold your brush just like a pencil, and try to paint with the brush tip; don't give your brush a bad hair day by pushing on it too hard!
5. Use your little brush for the little bits like your bird's eyes and wings, and your big brush for the big places.
6. What happens if I rub my brush too hard? Uh-oh! A hole in my paper!
7. Does your paint feel sticky? Add more water. Watercolor means we need to use lots of water!
8. Check your "bath water." Do you need to change it? Carry it carefully to the sink, pour it out, rinse and refill with cold water so your brush and paints don't get muddy!

OUR ART HELPERS then pass out the brushes and ... we paint! My students love listening to "quiet painting music" as they focus on their work; they say it makes them feel like REAL artists. As kids finish, I remind them to carry their work "flat as a pancake" to the drying rack and help them slide their work onto the rack. Loading the drying rack starting from the bottom shelf to the top helps everyone see which shelf is ready for the next work of art.

To finish our Rizzi project, we began the next class with a review of James Rizzi and his symbols. We then brainstormed more ideas that we could add to the large symbol sheet that we created when we began our project.

Students carefully cut out their bird paintings and glued them onto black construction paper. They drew their own symbols on small squares of paper (smiling suns and fish were favorites) and added these along the outside of their paintings to create colorful Rizzi-inspired borders.

The students' finished jazzy Rizzi birds were a successful first-time painting project. The children loved their birds so much, that they gave them cute names! "Pretty Bird" and "Purple Tweety" couldn't wait to go home with their happy owners. ■

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