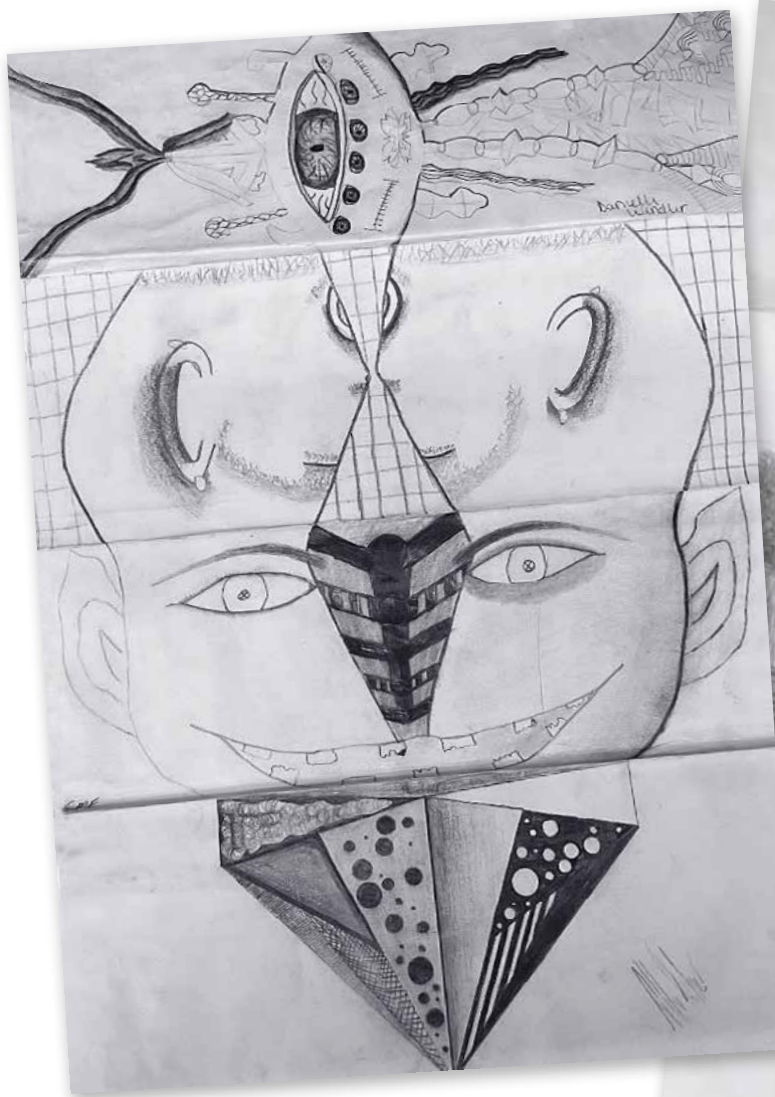




Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism group challenge

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Time: 4 weeks
(50-minute classes)



National Core Art Standards

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

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

Presenting

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

Responding

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

Materials list

- 9" x 12" or 12" x 18" drawing paper (folded into fourths) ([9728251](#) or [9728252](#))
- Pencils and erasers ([NE20211](#))
- Blending stumps or tissue for shading ([9726933](#))
- Reference images for figures, objects, or environments
- Examples of Surrealist drawings and collaborative art

Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- Understand the Surrealist art movement and its influence on modern art.
- Learn about the origins and artistic purpose of the Exquisite Corpse technique.
- Practice collaboration while maintaining individual artistic identity.
- Improve drawing and shading skills using realistic techniques.
- Reflect on the meaning and impact of collaborative artmaking.

Teacher prep

- Fold drawing paper ahead of time into four equal horizontal sections.
- Prepare a slideshow or printouts of Surrealist artwork, including Salvador Dalí, Marc Chagall, and René Magritte, as well as collaborative Exquisite Corpse examples.

Background

Surrealism was an art movement that began in the 1920s in Europe. It focused on exploring the unconscious mind — dreams, emotions, and hidden thoughts. Surrealist artists believed creativity flowed best when they let go of logic and allowed spontaneous, unplanned ideas to guide their art.

One creative technique they used was called the Exquisite Corpse. In this collaborative activity, artists folded a piece of paper into sections. Without seeing what the others had drawn, each artist contributed part of a figure — head, torso, legs, and feet. The results were often unexpected, humorous, or dreamlike, helping artists break creative blocks and work together in imaginative ways.

The name Exquisite Corpse comes from the first sentence ever created using the game: “The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine.” This bizarre and poetic phrase captured the surreal and unpredictable nature of the activity, and the name stuck.

Warm-up game: Surrealist sentence builder

1. Before students start their drawings, play this quick, fun, language-based warm-up to get their creative brains working (handouts on p. 4).
1. Each group will build surreal sentences using this structure:
The (adjective) (noun) (adverb) (verb) the (adjective) (noun).
2. Each person fills in one word in order, without seeing the others’ choices. When they reach the last person, read the sentences aloud and expect bizarre and hilarious results! Students can use these ideas as jumping-off points for their drawings.

Directions

Start by introducing the Exquisite Corpse drawing activity and explaining how the activity works. Show an example and model the following steps.

1. **Fold the top section of the paper backward**, so the other three sections are folded underneath it. When you are finished drawing on the first section, fold it under again, so only the second section is showing. This will keep everyone’s sections hidden from the next person.
2. As you work, **always draw to the fold lines** so the next artist knows where to continue. Ensure your lines extend just a bit over the fold, but not too much, to prevent giving away your part.
3. After you finish your section, **fold the paper again** so only the next blank section is visible to the next person. This ensures no one sees the prior drawings when it's their turn.
4. Pass the paper to the next person and repeat the steps until the full artwork is complete.

Week 1: Drawing the first section

1. Group students into groups of 4. Give each student a piece of paper held vertically and folded into four horizontal sections down the page.
2. On the top fourth of their papers, each student draws the head of a figure. They should shade it realistically, focusing on shadows, highlights, and blending.
3. The drawing must extend all the way to the fold line, and students should make sure the lines are visible on the fold so the next person knows where to start.
4. Once complete, students fold the top down so only the next blank section is visible.

Week 2: Adding the second section

1. Students trade papers with a classmate.
2. Without unfolding to see the first section, they draw their part on the second quarter, starting at the visible lines on the fold.
3. Again, they should shade and finish their section all the way to the next fold.

Week 3: Finishing the drawing

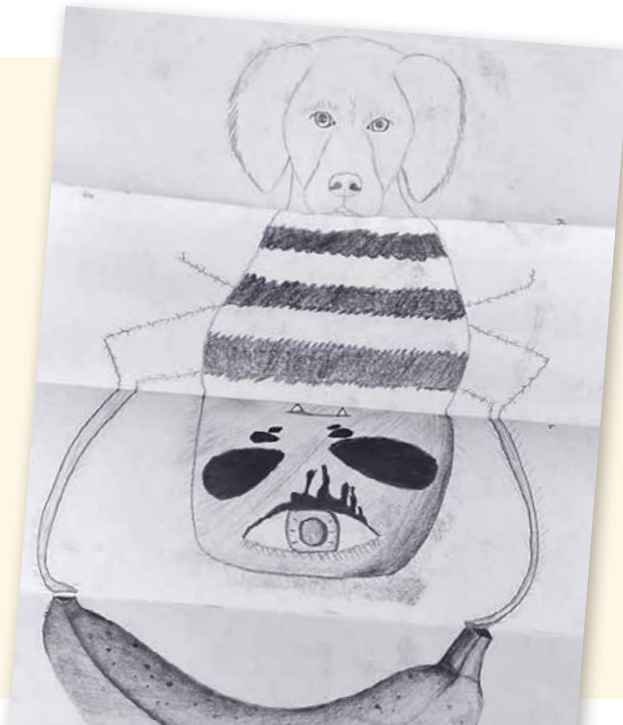
1. Papers continue to be passed on to a third and fourth student, each drawing a new section until the full image is complete.
2. Once the final section is finished, students unfold the drawings and reveal the full, collaborative artwork.

Reflection & discussion

Have students walk around and observe the finished drawings.

Then discuss or journal in response to these questions:

- What surprised you most about your group's final drawing?
- Did your part connect well with the others? Why or why not?
- How did not knowing the other sections change the way you drew?
- Did knowing who drew the part before you impact what you decided to draw?
- What's the most creative or unexpected combination you saw?
- What does this project teach you about working with others in art?
- How is this connected to Surrealist ideas about the unconscious mind and letting go of control?



Extension activities

Play a story version of Exquisite Corpse

Player 1: Start the story

- At the top of the paper, write one or two sentences to begin a story.
- (Example: "The robot chef accidentally added fireworks to the soup. Before he knew it, the soup exploded. Bits of carrots, peas, and potatoes went flying through the air.")
- Fold the paper down so that only your last line is visible.
- Pass the paper to Player 2.

Player 2: Continue the story

- Read only the visible line left by the previous player.
- Write one or two new sentences to continue the story based on that line.
- Fold the paper again, hiding all but your last line, and pass it to the next player.

Players 3, 4, & 5: Repeat the process

- Continue passing, reading, and writing with each new player only seeing the most recent line.
- Keep going until the paper is full or everyone has had a turn.

The reveal

- Unfold the paper to read the entire story from start to finish.
- Enjoy the unexpected twists and surreal storytelling that comes from limited context!

Play a sentence/picture version of Exquisite Corpse

Player 1: Write a sentence

- At the top of the paper, write a simple descriptive sentence (e.g., "A dog is skateboarding through a grocery store.")
- Pass the paper to Player 2.

Player 2: Draw a picture of the sentence

- Look only at the sentence and draw a literal interpretation of it in the space below.
- Fold the paper again to hide the sentence, leaving your drawing visible.
- Pass to Player 3.

Player 3: Write a sentence describing the picture

- Look only at the picture.
- Write a new sentence based on what you think is happening in the image (e.g., "A bear is surfing in a supermarket.")
- Fold to hide the drawing, revealing only the new sentence for the next player.

Player 4: Draw a picture of the sentence

- Repeat steps 2 and 3 until everyone has taken a turn or you run out of space.
- Unfold the paper to reveal the full, twisted journey from the original sentence to the final drawing.

Surrealist sentence starter

Each group will build surreal sentences using this structure: The (adjective) (noun) (adverb) (verb) the (adjective) (noun). Each person fills in one word in order, without seeing the others' choices.

Important: DO NOT peek at the words before yours!

To keep it a surprise:

- Fold the paper after each person writes their word, so only the next blank space is visible.
- Pass it to the next person without showing any previous words.
- If you're not sure where to write, ask your teacher — not your neighbor!

Sample sentence starter

The _____ (adjective) _____ (noun) _____ (adverb)
_____ (verb) the _____ (adjective) _____ (noun).

Word Prompts

Adjective: _____

Noun: _____

Adverb: _____

Verb: _____

Adjective: _____

Noun: _____

(Repeat for multiple rounds.)