
Art Masterpiece: Wang Yani “Lion is Awake!”*

Keywords: mood, color (value and shade), line (movement and stillness), shape (repetition and balance), style (*xieyi*)

Grade: 2nd – 3rd

Activity: Ink and brush animal painting

*This print is hard to purchase, but can be borrowed from CUSD Art Masterpiece. Instead of the print, the book, A Young Painter: The Life and Paintings of Wang Yani-- China's Extraordinary Young Artist by Zheng Zhensun and Alice Low, can be purchased from Amazon.com.



Meet the Artist:

“When you pick up a brush, don’t ever ask anyone for help. Because the most wonderful thing about painting is being left alone with your own imagination. I do not paint to get praise from others, but to play a game of endless joy.” —Wang Yani

- Wang Yani (WANG YAH nee) was born in 1975 in Guangxi, in southern China. In China, the last name comes first.
- Yani’s father, Wang Shiqiang, was an art teacher and a painter. He would take Yani to work with him, and she started drawing on the wall of his studio when she was two and a half years old. One time Yani had gotten into her father’s oil paints while he was gone and used them to create her own “masterpiece”—right over her father’s careful brush strokes. Wang

Shiqiang was angry at first, but Yani explained, “Papa, I was helping you paint. I want to paint and paint.”

- At that moment, Wang Shiqiang knew that his daughter’s talent and desire would make her an amazing artist, so he gave her some sheets of paper on which to draw. At first it was just scribbling, but by the time she was three years old, her drawings and paintings were realistic. They looked just like the object or animal she was trying to draw.
- When she was four years old, her father gave her a pet monkey. After that, monkeys became her favorite subject to paint. She would make up stories about her paintings. On her painting, “*Lion is Awake!*,” Yani writes: A lion lay sleeping on the road. Several little monkeys saw it. One said, “Let’s climb on its back.” All the monkeys climbed up except for two, which were too scared to do so. One said, “Let’s throw some fruit up there.”
- When she was eight years old, her father, gave up his career as an artist because he was afraid his style of painting might influence his daughter. He wanted Yani to develop her own style. He took her on tours of many countries to broaden her experience. He was very strict with her. He said that he had to be strict because of her amazing talent and fame.
- Her paintings are known throughout the world. She has shown her paintings in China, Japan, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. The country of China even put one of her monkey paintings on a postage stamp!



Definitions:

Mood – the mood of a painting is the feeling a painting gives us.

Line – straight lines in a painting indicate stillness; wavy or curved lines indicate movement.

Contrast – refers to differences in values, colors, textures, shapes, and other elements. Contrast creates visual excitement and adds interest to the work.

Emphasis – used by the artist to create dominance and focus in their work. Artists can emphasize color, value, shapes, or other art elements to achieve dominance.

Xieyi (“Idea Writing”) – Chinese word for Yani’s spontaneous style of painting

Possible Questions: Look and discuss the painting “*Lion is Awake!*” For example:

Mood – Is it funny or serious? What kind of character is the lion? Is he content or disgruntled? Are the monkeys mischievous or playful?

Color – Ask the students to name the colors used. The watercolor washes of red and smoky green add emphasis.

Line – What kinds of lines are used? Do you see straight lines or curved lines? Do you see thin lines or thick lines? Do you feel like the picture is moving or still?

Contrast – Yani lets some of the white paper show through to create contrast.

Shape – Have the children look for shapes. Trace the circles they find. What other shapes are repeated? Point out how the monkeys’ hands and feet echo the lion’s claws.

Xieyi (“Idea Writing”) – This spontaneous style of painting captures the life and vitality that the Chinese value in their painting. Yani has created each monkey differently, and the half-closed eye and downturned mouth of the irked lion makes you think that the monkeys are about to pay for their prank.

Activity: Ink and Brush animal painting

Materials needed:

- 8.5” X 11” white cardstock paper, one per student
- Black, red, and green tempera paint

- disposable cups to put paint in, approximately 20 cups
- brushes, one per student
- thin black markers
- paper towels
- newsprint to cover the students' desks with (optional)
- smocks to protect the kids' clothes...and yours (optional)
- 10" X 12" red or black construction paper to mount the artwork on when completed (optional)

**** Troubleshooting Thoughts ****

As a courtesy, you may want to let the students' parents know ahead of time that they will be painting in Art Masterpiece so the kids can wear grubby clothes. See "Messy Art Note" attached to the end of this lesson. (The teacher can help you with this.)

Students will have one cup of plain black tempera paint but the rest will be diluted with water, about one part paint to three parts water. Experiment and see what works best for your project. They will need very little paint. In total, students will have: one cup of black paint, one cup of diluted black paint, one cup of diluted red paint, and one cup of diluted green paint. Two or three students can share a "set" of paints. Give each child their own cup of plain water and a paper towel to clean the brush in between colors.

Process:

1. Pass out paper, a plain cup of water, and a brush to each student. A group of three or so students can each share a "set" of paint cups.
2. Wang Yani painted her favorite animals – monkeys. Ask each student to think of their favorite animal. Have the students use the black paint to paint the outline of their animal. Their animal should take up the majority of the page.
3. They can then use the watered-down black paint (which should be a lighter shade of black) to paint the rest of their animal.
4. Ask the students to pick out just one or two features of their animal to emphasize with a wash of the red and green paints. (For example, the eyes, lips, paws, ears etc.)
5. Using the black marker, have the students write a few sentences at the bottom of their painting explaining what they painted and one or two

details about them. (If you have time, you can have them take turns telling a brief story about it to the class.)

6. Remind them to write their names on their artwork at the bottom of the paper with the red marker. Wang Yani used a signature stamp with red ink to sign her name. You can point this out to the students.
7. Let the artwork dry.
8. Optional: Mount artwork on the red or black construction paper with the artist blurb on the back. Hang it up to display.

Examples:





Parent Note:

Today in Art Masterpiece we discussed Chinese artist Wang Yani. She painted *Lion is Awake!* when she was 8 years old. Her paintings are known throughout the world. China even put one of her monkey paintings on a postage stamp.

The students then created and ink and brush painting of their favorite animals with an accompanying story.



***Lion is Awake!* by Wang Yani**

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“Messy Art” Note:

Our next Art Masterpiece lesson might be a little messy.
We will be using _____. Most art
media is “washable” but it still might leave a faint stain.
Please don’t send your child to school in new clothes on
this day: _____ at _____.
(date) *(time)*

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