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

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

Grade: Primary grades (K to 3rd) OR advanced version for secondary grades (4th to 6th.)

Activity: Ink and brush painting



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. China is a beautiful country with mountains, rivers, and all kinds of animals.

Yani grew up in a loving family. Yani’s mother worked in a department store and her salary helped to buy Yani’s art supplies. Yani’s father, Wang Shiqiang, was an art teacher and a painter. Yani’s brother is also a gifted painter.

Yani’s father 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!

You may enjoy reading more about Wang Yani in a book written about her. The name of the book is *A Young Painter: the Life and Painting of Wang Yani, China's Extraordinary Young Artist*. It is written by Zheng Zhensun and Alice Low.



“Lion is Awake!” lesson and project for primary grades (K to 3rd)

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 jade 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 painting

Materials needed:

- 8” X 10” white drawing paper.
- Black, red, and green tempera paint
- disposable cups to put paint in
- brushes
- thin black markers
- paper towels
- newsprint to cover the students’ desks with
- smocks to protect the kids’ clothes...and yours.
- 10” X 12” red or black construction paper to mount the artwork on when completed.

“Lion is Awake!” lesson and project for primary grades (K to 3rd)

**** Troubleshooting Thoughts ****

As a courtesy, let the students’ parents know ahead of time that they will be painting in Art Masterpiece so the kids can wear grubby clothes.

Children will have one cup of black paint and one set of colors (black, red, and green) that is watered down. Dilute tempera paints, about one part paint to three parts water, but experiment and see what works best for your project.

Two kids can share paints. Give each child one cup of plain water and a paper towel to clean their brushes in between colors.

You can pre-mount the artist blurb on the back of black or red construction paper.

Process:

1. Cover the student’s desks with newsprint and pass out smocks.
2. Give each student one piece of paper and one brush.
3. Give a small amount of tempera paint to each student or table.
 - One cup of black paint
 - One cup of watered down black paint
 - one cup of watered down red paint
 - one cup of watered down green paint
 - one plain cup of water.
4. Give each student a paper towel.
5. Wang Yani painted her favorite animals – monkeys. Ask each student to think of their favorite animal.
6. Have the students use the black paint to paint the outline of their animal and watered-down black paint (which should be a lighter shade of black) to paint the rest of their animal.
7. Ask the students to pick out just one or two things to emphasize with a wash of the red and green paints.
8. Using the black marker, have the students write a few sentences at the bottom of their painting explaining what their painting is of, and have them tell a brief story about it.
9. Remind them to write their names on their artwork. (Wang Yani used a signature stamp with red ink to sign her name. You can point this out to the students.)
10. Let the artwork dry. Mount it on the red or black construction paper with the artist blurb on the back. Hang it up to display.

Advanced “*Lion is Awake!*” Lesson and Project for secondary grades (4th – 6th)

Definitions:

- Mood – the mood of a painting is the feeling a painting gives us.
- Value (referring to color) – the lightness or darkness of a color
- Shade (referring to color) – color that is darkened with black is called a shade.
- 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.
- Balance – refers to the distribution of visual weight in a work of art. Balance can be symmetrical or asymmetrical.
- Unity – Visual unity is the sense that all of the parts of the painting are working together to achieve a common result and are in harmony.
- *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. Look for different values, or shades, of color. Chinese painting is characterized by the use of black and seven values of color. How does color help balance the work? The watercolor washes of red and smoky jade add emphasis and unity.

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 uses the traditional ink stone, ink stick, and brushes on rice paper to achieve her desired effect. When she paints, she uses the tip, side, or full stroke of her brush for precise control of her lines. Notice the technique of letting the white paper show through to create contrast and texture.

Shape – Have the children look for shapes. Trace the circles and notice how their repetition creates a feeling of movement and helps balance the painting. 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.

Advanced “Lion is Awake!” Lesson and Project for secondary grades (4th – 6th)

Activity: Ink and Brush painting

Materials needed:

- 8” X 10” white drawing paper OR rice paper
- Black, red, and green ink OR the same colors in tempera paint
- disposable cups to put paint OR ink in
- brushes
- disposable plates
- thin black markers
- paper towels
- newsprint to cover the students’ desks with
- smocks to protect the kids’ clothes...and yours.
- 10” X 12” red or black construction paper to mount the artwork on when completed.

**** Troubleshooting Thoughts ****

If using ink: make sure students understand that only a TINY amount of ink is needed on their brushes. You can always add more ink; you can never remove it! Also, make sure you let the kids’ parents know ahead of time that they will be using ink in Art Masterpiece so the kids can wear grubby clothes.

If using rice paper: Don’t use pencil on the rice paper – it can rip. Also, rice paper is VERY absorbent so painting with ink or tempera will be different than painting on regular drawing or watercolor paper.

Two kids can share inks/paints. Give each child one cup of plain water and a paper towel to clean their brushes in between colors.

You can pre-mount the artist blurb on the back of black or red construction paper.

Process:

1. Cover the student’s desks with newsprint and pass out smocks.
2. Give each student one piece of paper, a paper towel, a cup of water, and one brush.
3. IF USING TEMPERA PAINTS: Give a small amount of tempera paint to each student or group of students: one cup of black paint, one cup of red paint, one cup of green paint.
4. IF USING INK: Give each child a small (a few drops) of ink in a plastic cup. Students will have three cups – one of black, one of red, and one of green.
5. Wang Yani painted her favorite animals – monkeys. Ask each student think of their favorite animal.
6. Chinese painting is characterized by the use of black and seven values of color. Have the students experiment with making *up to* seven different values of black (blackest black to palest gray) by watering down their paint/ink on the plate.

- Have them “test” their shades on a scrap piece of paper. Then have students use their shades to paint their animal.
7. Ask the students to pick out just one or two things to emphasize with a wash of the red and green paints/inks.
 8. Using the black marker, have the students write a few sentences at the bottom of their painting explaining what their painting is of, and have them tell a brief story about it.
 9. Remind them to write their names on their artwork. (Wang Yani used a signature stamp with red ink to sign her name.)
 10. Let the artwork dry. Mount it on the red or black construction paper with the artist blurb on the back. Hang it up to display.

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.

We discussed mood, color (value and shade), line (movement and stillness), shape (repetition and balance), and style (*xieyi*) with the students today. The students then created and ink and brush painting of their favorite animals with an accompanying story.



***Lion is Awake!* (c. 1983)
Wang Yani (1975 -)**

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