6

Teaching: Foundation

When faced with non-portfolio students assigned to participate in an art class, regardless of their interests, one must move quickly to see who is sitting in the classroom. To accomplish this task I ask the students to draw the geometric still life, which was discussed in chapter four. I also request that they respond to a reading survey. The survey is designed to identify students who experience rapid mental fatigue while reading. Those who experience rapid fatigue may see as I do, in patterns, and are possibly visual learners; or, it could be something else, possibly dyslexia.

Many of my art colleagues and Art Academy students share similar traits that make reading and linear visual tasks difficult. However, there are students who indicate reading fatigue but are definitely not visual learners. Those students who indicated a rapid mental fatigue while reading and were not visual learners consistently performed poorly in academic as well as in art classes. This may have something to do with the student's ability to do sustained focused tasks which becomes very evident in the gridded drawing assignments where concentration and focus are the primary skills needed for the assignment. Examples will be provided later in this chapter.

The third activity I request of students is to read three brief articles with questions they must answer in complete sentences. The articles are about a duck accidentally making a painting, the comparison of a pile of bricks by an artist and a brick layer's assistant, and Duchamp's readymade Fountain. The answers to the questions are subjective; what I am trying to determine is their level of thinking and use of language, as well as how disciplined they are at fulfilling an assigned task.

The results of the three assessment activities will give me a much clearer cognitive profile of the students I will be facing in the classroom. It identifies students that I should monitor and, if needed, move to the front of the classroom where they can receive assistance. If all three surveys indicate low cognitive thinking skills, I alert the academic affairs principal so that they may monitor the student's academic performance and provide assistance when and if needed.

If the class sizes are not too large, I try to keep the front row of desks open so students can voluntarily come forward and seek assistance. If a student is having difficulties with an assignment, or having difficulties focusing, I can move that student to the front to assist with their work, keep them focused, and ensure they remain productive members of the class.

Using the standard scholastic approach, content knowledge is taught in a linear, sequential order. We learn to count by starting with the number 1 and sequentially learn the remaining numbers. The same is true of the alphabet, vocabulary, musical notes, and mathematical methods and formulas. The random selection approach of projects, materials, and media of typical art curricula would lack the coherent learning and skill development necessary for any sustained comprehensive discipline-knowledge learning.

My choices in designing the foundation program were to eliminate materials students would not know or understand how to use and that could not be properly taught in a large class of diversely interested

students. From experience, I have also discovered that expensive art production materials are wasted, misused, destroyed, and stolen by students that did not wish to participate in the art program or the assigned projects. Destruction of material by foundation students denies the interested and advanced students much needed production materials and valuable learning opportunities.   The materials for the foundation course are the students' own pencils and erasers.   The assignments are sequential and based on concepts with measurable objectives.

The first assignment after student assessment is the only subjective visual assignment that will be given to the students. I need to give the students an activity that will allow me to observe how well all members of the class are capable of focusing on an assigned task. It is an opportunity to monitor and modify behavior, as well as move individuals who may become distractions in their current location. I make it a point to inform the students that I manage the classroom to create an optimal learning environment and enforce the methods necessary for each student to be successful in the art program.

The first assignment replicates a Dada poem construction technique used by Romanian and French avant-garde poet Tristan Tzara. Through random word selection, the students reconstruct and re-title a Shakespearean sonnet. The randomly placed words may or may not make sense, which is part of the challenges Dadaism posed to the accepted art practices at the beginning of the twentieth century. Because the students are constructing a Dadaist poem, there isn't a right or wrong solution: As long as they meet the design criteria, they are guaranteed a grade of 100. The advantages to this assignment, as mentioned before, is that I have the opportunity to acclimate students to my class management style and the attentive focused demands required in visual art. At the same time, I can also reassure students that they can be successful in the course with their first grade of 100. If students begin the year with a grade of 100, they may work more diligently to protect and maintain their high grade. This assignment will also reveal those students who do just the minimum amount of work to get by, which normally remains unchanging throughout the year. I suspect it is not because they can't do better, but because they choose not to work to their full potential. It is unfortunate, but they represent the segment of students who are disinterested in art and lack the discipline to work beyond their limited interests and self-imposed limitations.

Below is a reflection and examples of the Dada poem assignment. At the time of writing this reflection, my thinking was influenced by Martin Heidegger's book *The Elucidations of Friedrich Holderlin*. One of the key concepts I adopted into my teaching philosophy was Heidegger's assertion that learning often requires forgetting. Previous knowledge is preconception, and in order for a new truth or knowledge to be attained, old misconceptions must be forgotten. This concept will be discussed further with examples in this and the following two chapters.

For individuals who don't think about what they see, overcoming misconceptions is a challenging task. The more difficult it is for an individual to forget their misconceptions, the more likely it is that the student isn't an artist.   Artists have the ability to learn from what they see because what they see changes the way they think.

What happens when you are always right?

What happens when forgetting becomes an essential part of learning?

What Happens when you are always right?

What happens when you are always right? Probably the last time that feeling occurred was as a preschool –child, where the imagination wrapped in its infantile omnipotence could easily solve any problem. It is only through experience or through education we discover there is a right and wrong and the world is govern by rules, laws and reason.

The students were introduced to the 20th century art movement known as Dadaism. Briefly stated, Dadaism is an art movement intended to challenge established concepts of what is and isn't art. Thinking or idea production circumnavigates traditional production processes by asserting individual authority over institutional and cultural view, creating a new form of conceptual art.

The Dadaists' intellectual and aesthetic challenges to authority and culture in the 20th century are still relevant and practiced today, and the question of what is and isn't art must always be sorted out as a personal choice. In the poem writing and production assignment, the students are placed under the umbrella of Dadaism where set rules and authoritarianism do not exist. In this vacuum, all that exists is the certainty of one's own thoughts. The criteria to judge what is correct and incorrect is removed and abandoned. Students' answers based on their own thoughts and experiences can be the only correct responses. The elimination of punctuation punishment, the bludgeoning corrections of the teacher's red ink pen, allows students to see the merits of their own thoughts and ideas.

In the written assignment, which is also a part of their initial assessment activities, students were given brief articles and questions to subjectively determine what is and isn't art. They were asked whether art is a conscious act of an artist or the accidental actions of a duck. If a pile of bricks by a famous artist in a museum is art, then is an identical pile of bricks constructed by a brick layer's assistant at a construction site art? The final question becomes whether a readymade object not made by the artist's hand can be claimed as the artist's art work.   As stated, the right answer is their answer, because there is no right or wrong answer to any of these questions and the correct outcome is the student's awareness of the importance of their own thoughts and the choices they make. The process becomes a source of empowerment and gives the students the confidence to continue to make choices as they proceed to the next step.

What happens when forgetting becomes an essential part of learning?

Poem construction:

The assignment is based on an idea of poem construction by Poet Tristan Tzara. Tristan had cut up a Shakespearian sonnet and placed each individual word into a hat. He then proceeded to pull each word from the hat and construct a new poem based on the random selections of words from Shakespeare's

sonnet. He then signed the randomly selected Shakespearean words as his poem. This raises the question as to who is the author of the poem. Is it Tzara or Shakespeare? The students are to answer this question by repeating the act of reconstructing Shakespeare's words into a new poem and decide its title and authorship/ownership.

The students are given a Shakespearean sonnet with its title and Shakespeare's name removed. Below is the sonnet the students were given.

Weary with toil, I hasten me to my bed, the dear repose for limbs with travel tired, but then begins a journey in my head to work my mind when body's work's expired; for then my thoughts, from far where I abode, intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee, and keep my drooping eyelids open wide, looking on darkness which the blind do see; save that my sour's imaginary sight presents thy shadow to my sightless view, which like a jewel hung in ghastly night, makes black night beauteous and her old face new. Lo, thus by day my limbs, by night my mind, for thee and for myself, no quiet find.

The title was removed to eliminate any influence it might have on the students' thinking. The students were instructed to cut out each individual word and place the words in an envelope. Punctuation can be cut out and used or discarded because there were no rules governing punctuation for the assignment. Once all the words are in the envelope they may begin to randomly select words from the envelope and glue them to their booklet. They must glue the words down in their booklet in the order they are drawn from the envelope. They may start and stop a line whenever they choose. When the poem construction is finished they are to read and title the newly constructed poem. After titling the poem they are to select or construct images they feel would best illustrate the poem. The entire space of the booklet must be designed and filled.

Reflection:

Over the years I had noticed a similarity in the titling and expressions of the student's poems. This leads me back to Nietzsche's quote in chapter two of word being a symbol and how word symbols are given definition by personal experiences. Shakespeare and his title had been removed, his words are scrambled and placed in random order, and yet a Shakespearian theme emerges from the student's work. The students are not studying a poem by Shakespeare; they are studying the individual words used by Shakespeare. Individual words create images that can reflect personal experiences and interpretations. Idea expression occurs by word association, regardless of word order. This is identical to how a painting creates meaning through the associations of images that are often not aligned in a linear order, as exemplified by Nicholas Poussin's painting *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, referenced in chapter 3.

What is essential in reading and experiencing literature is the ability to project into the roles, emotions and experiences presented by the writer. Examining the words without the organization and authorship of Shakespeare became a shortcut for the students to project their own thoughts and experiences based on the interpretation of the word images. They examined the content of the sonnet much more closely than a casual reading, and by doing so came under a greater influence and awareness of the word as visual symbol and with experiential meaning. The words, no longer Shakespeare's possessions, are repossessed by the students and are interpreted through personal ideas of individual experience.
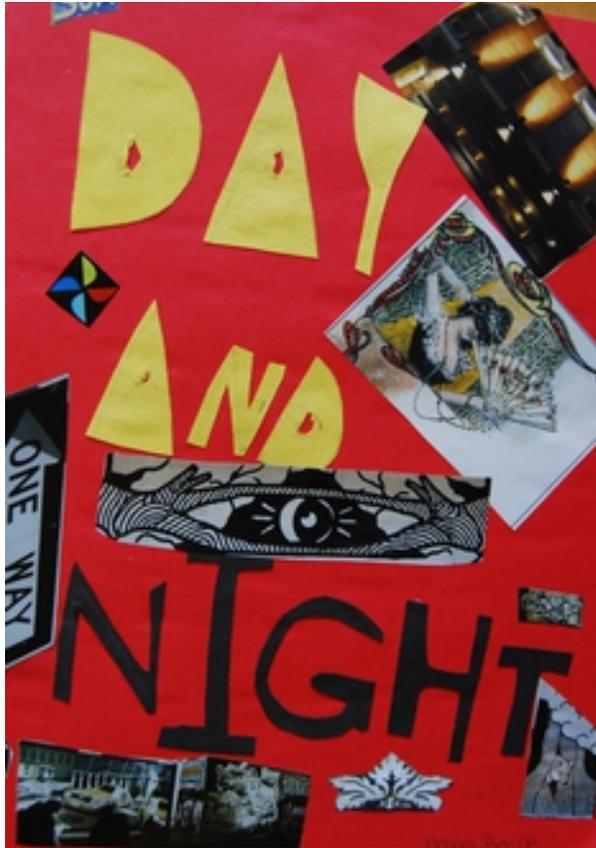
What happens when you are always right? The individual becomes central to idea production. What happens when forgetting becomes the essential part of learning? The limitations of preconceptions are diminished, making the experience of learning possible.

The small sample of works below are not being individually critiqued; they are meant to be seen and projected into the Shakespearean sonnet as well as projecting into the many themes of Shakespeare's works. It is the emotional, experiential content reflected in the student's work that allows the plasticity of associations to a number of Shakespeare's written works.

Student Work:

Each page contains the cover title page and the inside page of the poem.
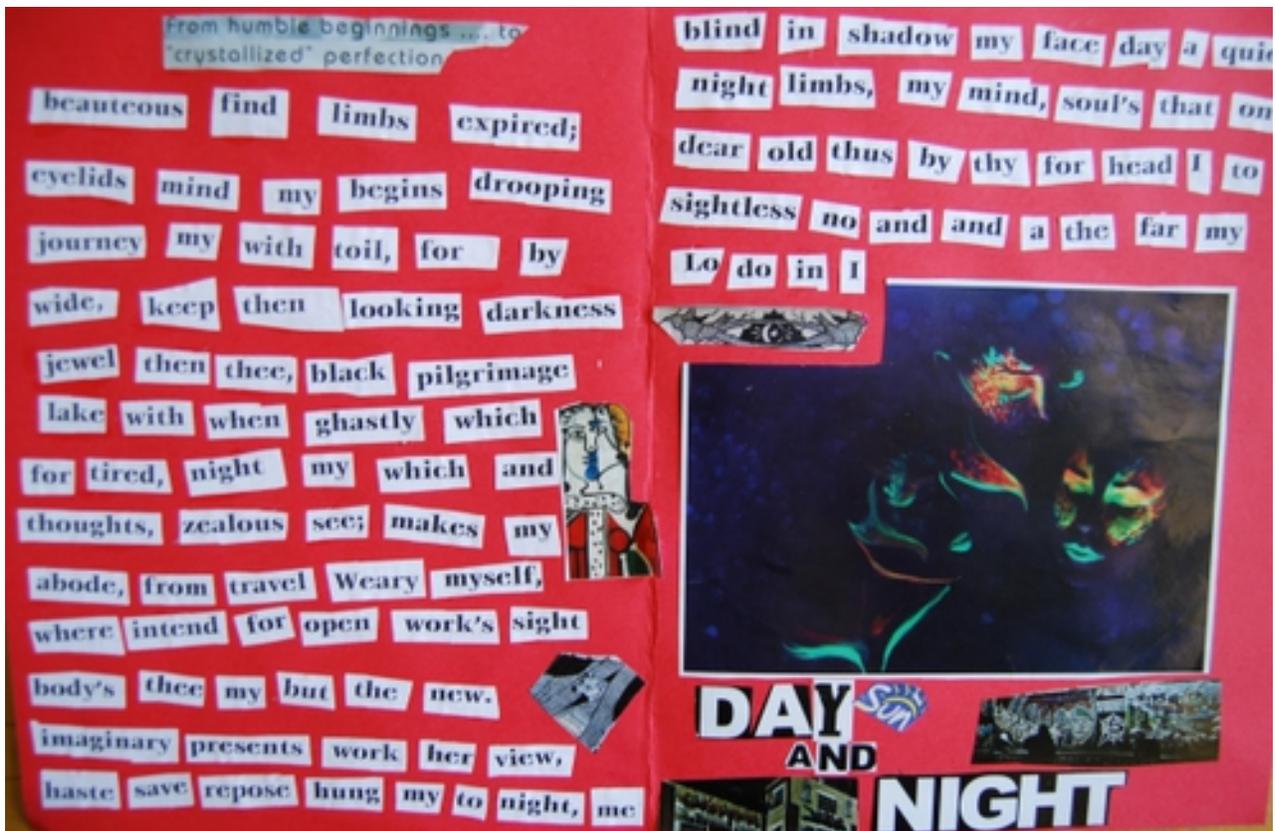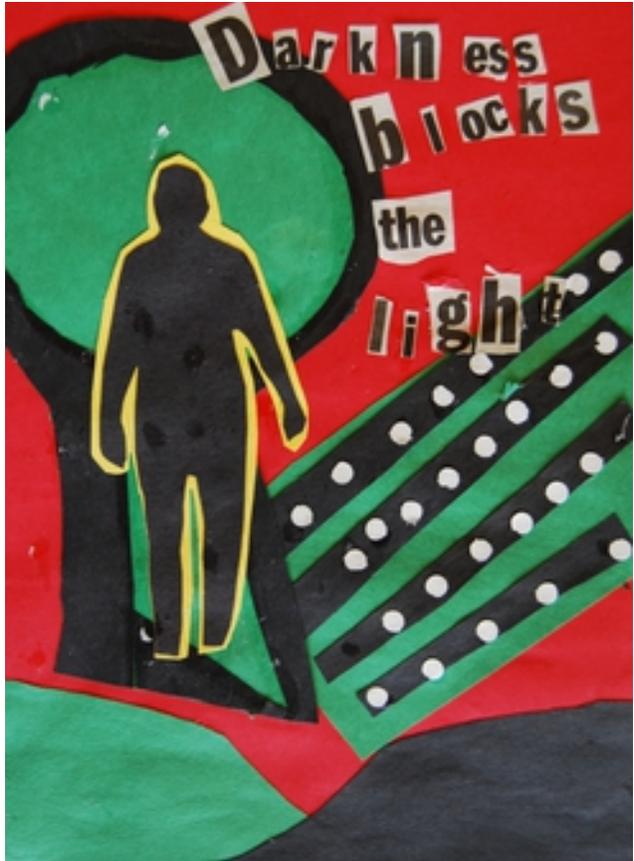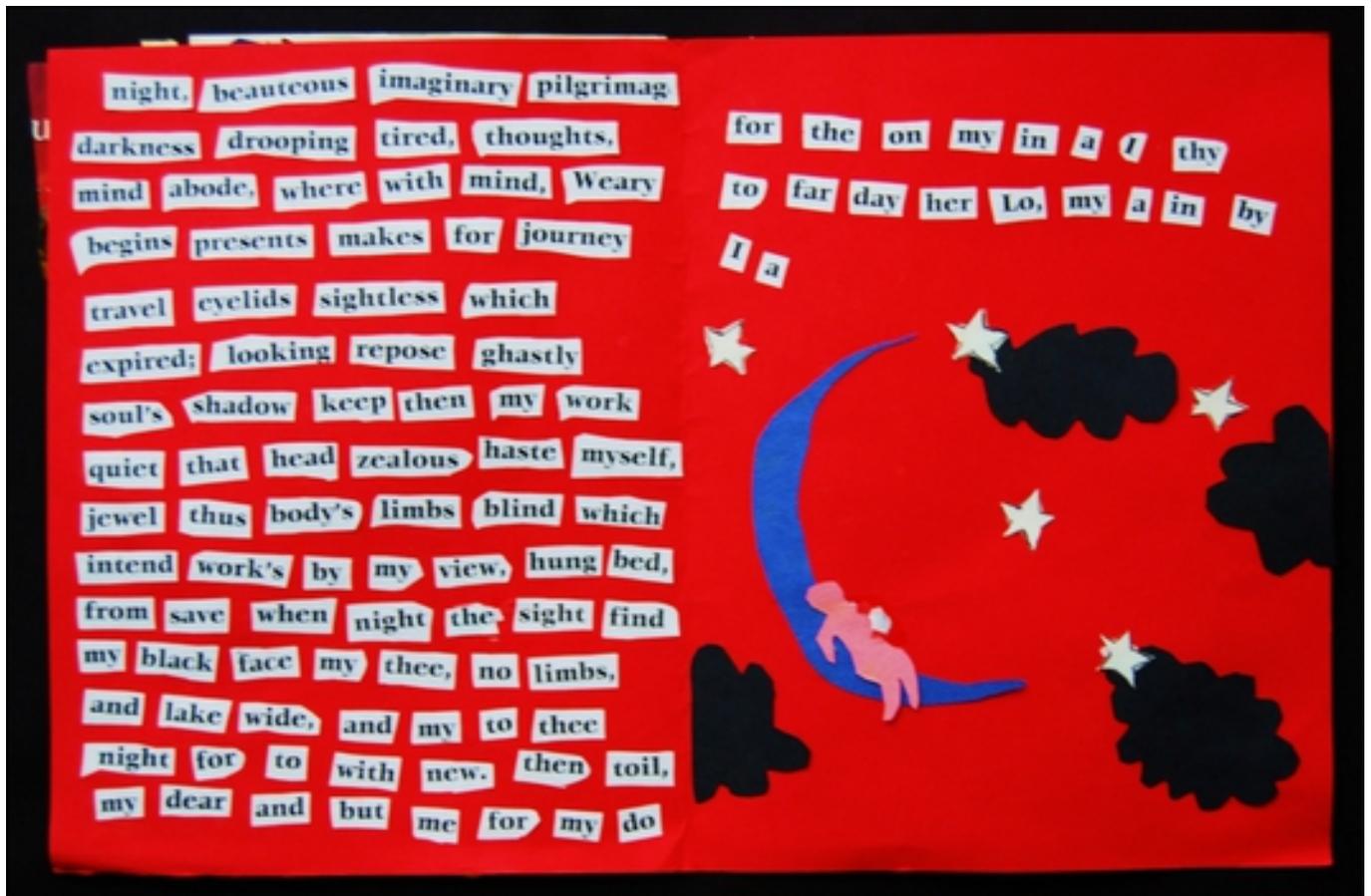
Concept: Space

Most students will successfully complete the first assignment of the Dada poem. It is important to build their confidence in their ability to succeed in the course by providing high success learning opportunities where the understanding of concepts is more important than their slowly developing drawing ability. All assignments must be presented to the students as visual notation symbols and content knowledge necessary for an artist to work within the discipline domain of the visual arts.

One of the fundamental elements of art is the ability to create space on a flat, two-dimensional surface. The illusion of space on a flat, two-dimensional surface is a visual symbol system separate and different from the three-dimensional world we see and experience. It is believed the world we see through our eyes is projected in our brain as a three-dimensional holographic image. What we see in our mind must be translated into a comparable visual image using the visual notation techniques of the artist. The process is similar to language. Words are auditory sounds that must be translated through a language

notation system. When we see the written word, our mind hears the word and when we see the artist's visual symbol the mind visually projects the visual symbol into the corresponding three dimensional object.

A photograph is an easy method for students to understanding the representation of space on a flat picture plane. Students understand that the image of the photograph is a representation of the physical world we exist in and can begin to see how the world around us can be translated into a flat picture plane. I begin by taking a photograph of three students lined up against a wall at the same distance from the camera so students can compare size relationships of the photographed students. I then place and photograph the three students down a long hallway. One person is near the camera, one halfway down the hallway and the last person at the end of the hallway. The students will be able to compare the size relationships of the individuals in the first picture to the second picture. They will discover the person at the end of the hallway is much smaller than the person closest to the camera. They will also be able to notice the difference in light/dark values of the individuals, as well as the diminished details of the individual furthest away. They will easily be able to see that the person's feet closest to the viewer/camera are lower down in the picture plane and the feet of the person farthest away are higher up the page in the picture plane. This information will now be carried over to a simple drawing assignment.
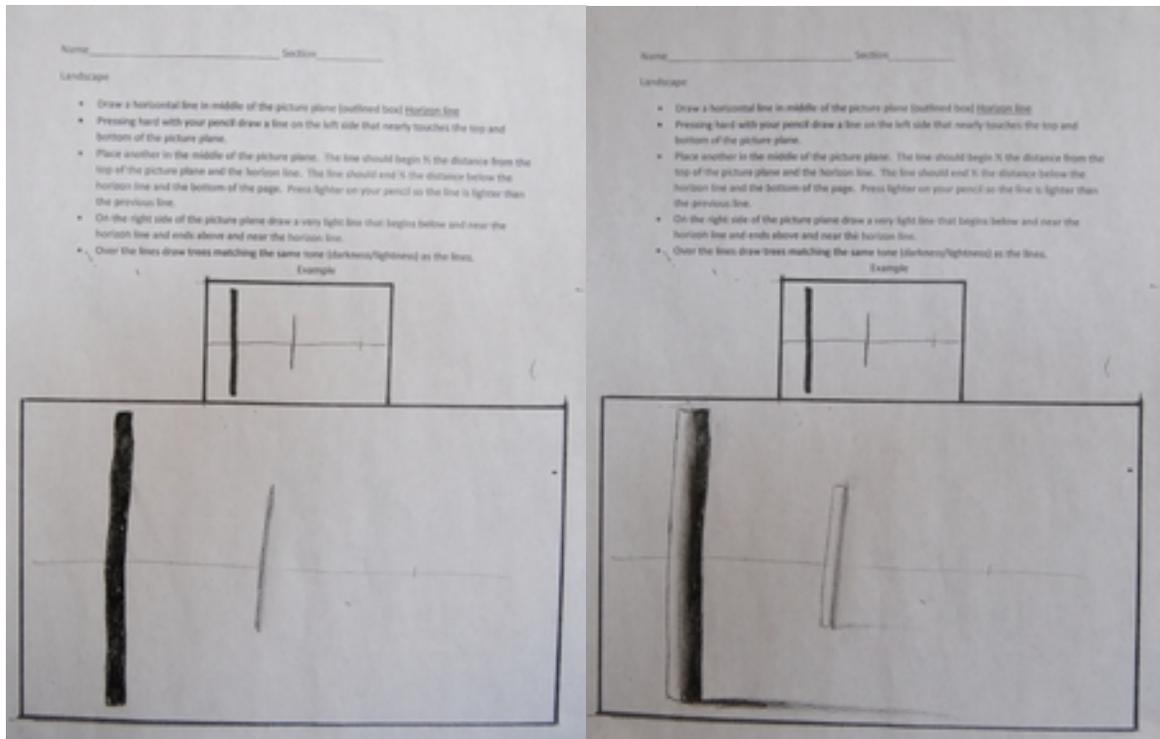
The directions in this assignment are in two symbol systems: writing and visual printed image in the small rectangle. Students are to draw the horizon line and make a wide, dark, vertical line on the left that starts and stops near the top and bottom boundary lines of the large rectangle.

The second line is narrower and lighter, and starts half the distance from the bottom of the page to the horizon line. It ends half the distance between the horizon line and the top of the rectangle picture plane.

The third line is very lightly drawn, beginning just below the horizon line and ending just above the horizon line. The illustration on the right shows that lines are added to the left and middle lines to give added width to represent cylindrical poles. The lines are blended to represent shading, indicating the light source is on the left of the poles. Cast shadows are added to the bottom of the left and center poles to indicate ground, while the right pole is without shadows.

As objects recede in (pictorial) space, value, color, and clarity diminish. Objects of higher contrast, such as the left pole, visually project forward from the light background. Objects closest to the tone of the light background visually recede. This spatial concept is called atmospheric perspective.

This simple exercise is used to illustrate to the students how little effort is necessary to create the illusion of three dimensional space on a flat surface. It also illustrates that this major element of art is a very simple concept that can be easily understood and mastered. This simple assignment is also meant to build student's confidence in their ability to successfully meet the requirements of the course.

The next step is to apply the concept to making a simple three-tree landscape. The object of the assignment is not how well students can draw trees, but rather how well they understand the concepts employed to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. If a student successfully employs the concepts being taught to create their landscape, they receive full credit; no grade points are deducted for elementary developmental level drawings of trees. This grading action reinforces the value of learning concepts and helps to diminish their self-conscious awareness of their visual illiteracy. This grading action would be comparable to the valuing of syntax over penmanship in a writing assignment.

Below is an example of the three tree landscape which is an extension of the three line/pole drawing. The 3 trees in the upper right-hand corner are a printed example on the worksheet to be used as a guide to assist students in the drawing assignment.

Landscape color

Above is the application of the learned spatial concepts to a color medium. Oil crayon was selected as the drawing medium because it shares some of the characteristics of a paint medium such as mixing and blending. All beginning students when making a color drawing or painting begin with the subject matter and then proceed to fill in around it. This is an incorrect procedure and the opposite of how an artist must work. The steps demonstrate that the background is the starting point and the subject of the three trees are the last objects to be drawn. The steps proceed in the following order.

1. Application of blue

2. Application of white

3. Blend white and blue

4. Application of peach to tone and reduce the chroma of the green in the background

5. Application of the yellow green

6. Blend green and peach and add yellow to the foreground

7. Draw trees

8. Add shadows to trees and cast shadows on the ground. Tone background tree with peach

Toning or reducing the chroma of the background colors is how atmospheric perspective is achieved through color. Colors of low chroma visually recede in the picture plane while high chroma colors visually advance. Toned colors occupy the distant background objects while the higher chroma and contrast objects occupy the foreground of the picture plane.

One point perspective

Atmospheric perspective operates with a set of general rules in respect to size and clarity of objects within the picture plane. One point perspective has a specific set of rules determining object size as it recedes into the picture plane. The one point perspective view is also how mammals with front mounted eyes see. It is how they are able to focus in a narrow 15% vision range to accurately judge distance and location as opposed to the panoramic view of the herbivore with eyes on the side of their head.

One point perspective is constructed with a horizon line and a single vanishing point. The horizon line always represents the eye level of the viewer and the vanishing point represents the position of the viewer's head. The vanishing point is the point on the horizon where everything converges and vanishes. Imagine seeing parallel train tracks converging and meeting at the vanishing point.

The students are given step by step instruction on how to draw three cubes in space using the one point perspective system. They are instructed to draw one cube above the horizon line and to the left of the vanishing point, one cube with its top aligned with the horizon line and to the left of the vanishing point and one cube below the horizon line and to the right of the vanishing point.

Below in the top left illustration a horizon line and vanishing point are drawn and three squares are drawn to indicate the position of the cubes. In the illustration on the right diagonal lines are drawn from

the vanishing point to the corners of the three squares. In the lower illustration parallel lines to the cubes are drawn between the diagonal lines originating from the vanishing point to complete the drawings of the cubes.

SPACE - LINEAR   NAME
BELL WORK #5
Copy the 3 one point perspective drawings below. #1 represents the cube above the
viewer and the horizon line. #2 represents being on the same level and height (eye
level of the viewer). #3 represents the cube as being below eye level of the viewer
and below the horizon line. The horizon line represents eye level.
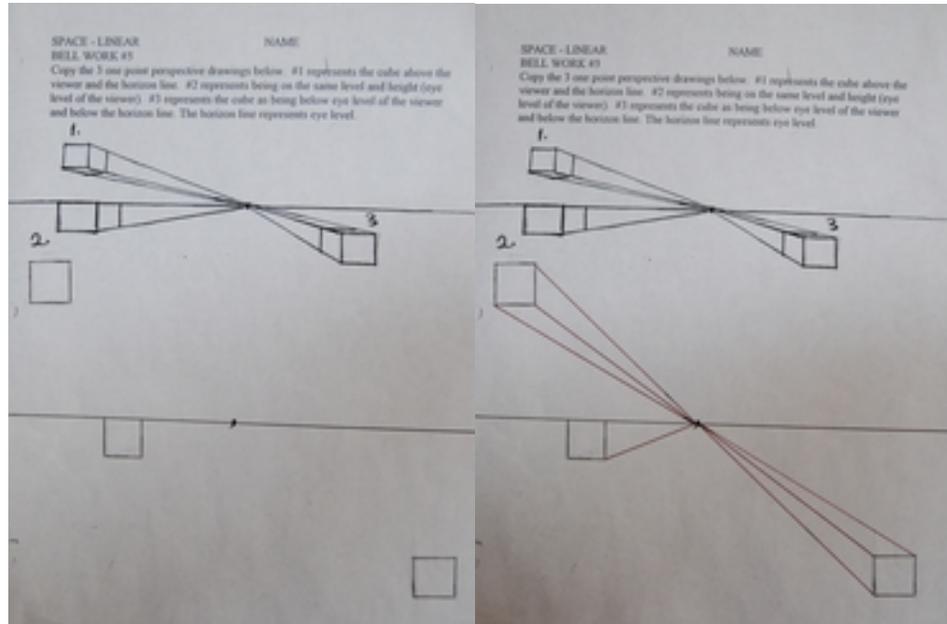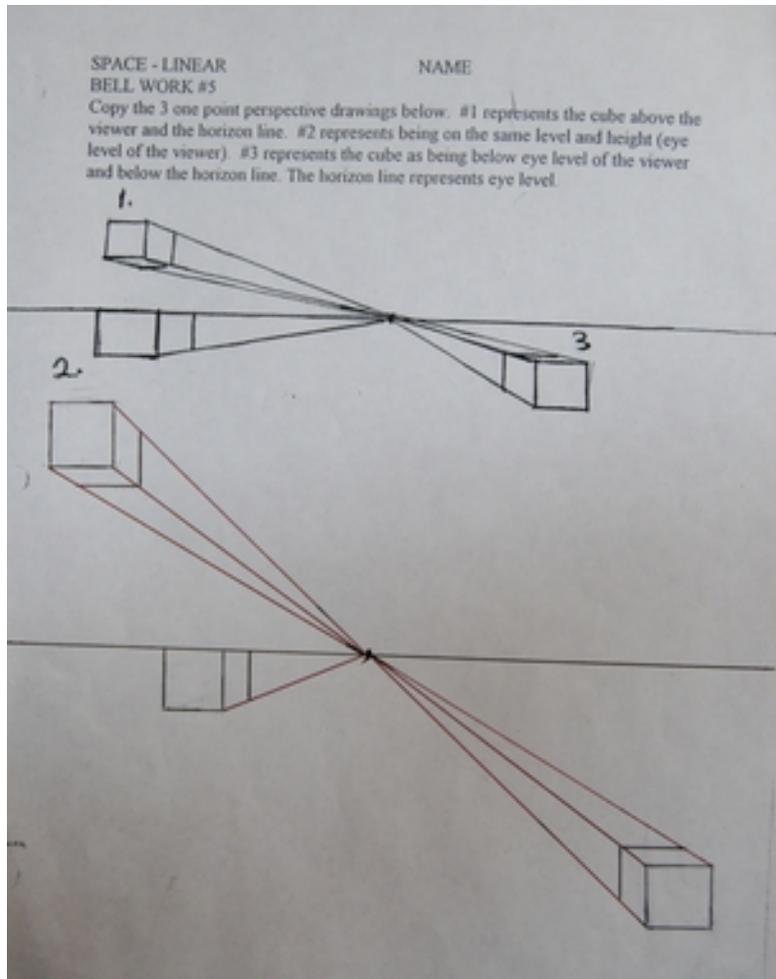
Cityscape:

The students are now to use the one point perspective system to construct a simple city scape of one building, sidewalks, street and telephone poles. The illustration below begins with the horizon line and vanishing point. On the left a large rectangle is drawn with three smaller rectangles drawn for windows. The top and bottom right corners of the large rectangle are connected to the vanishing point as indicated by the red diagonal lines. A vertical line is added between the two diagonal lines to create the right side of the building.
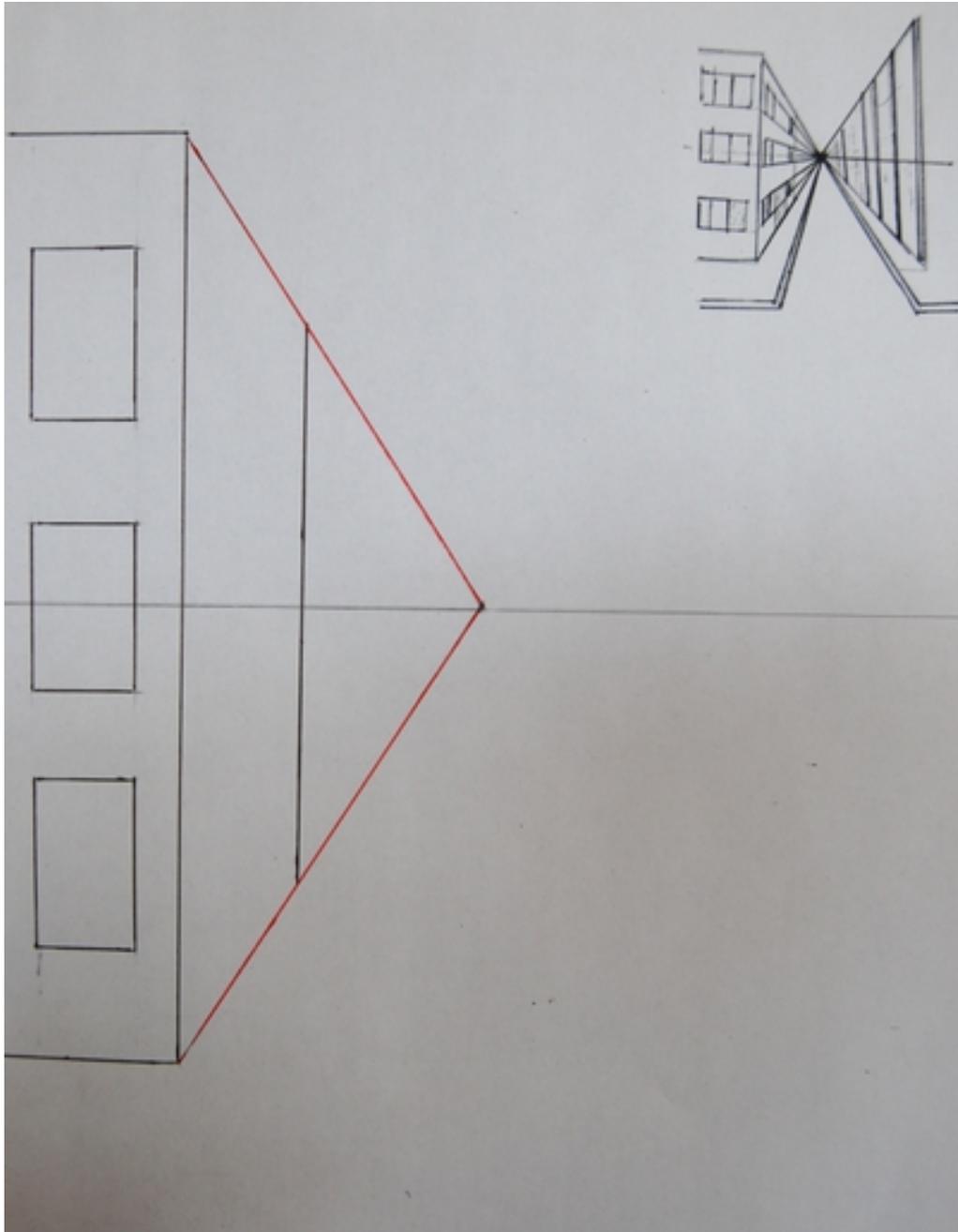
Horizontal lines from the top and bottom of each of the three rectangle windows are drawn to the right front corner of the building. Where the horizontal lines intersect the vertical line diagonal lines are drawn to the vanishing point. The diagonal lines to the vanishing point forms the top and bottom of each of the three windows on the right side of the building and vertical lines are added to complete the windows.
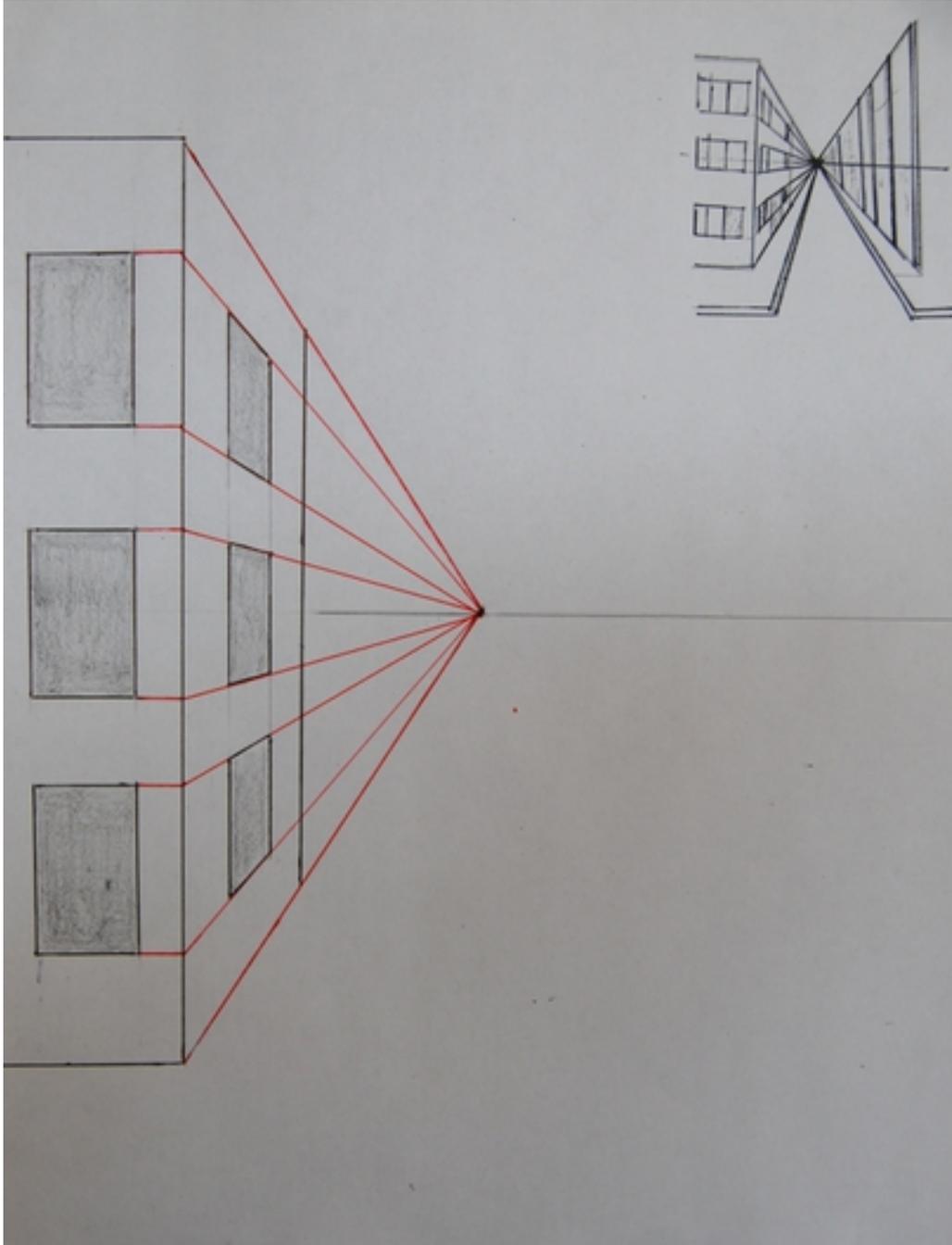
Sidewalks and a street is added using diagonal lines originating from the vanishing point and one telephone pole is added on the left on the inside corner of the sidewalk.
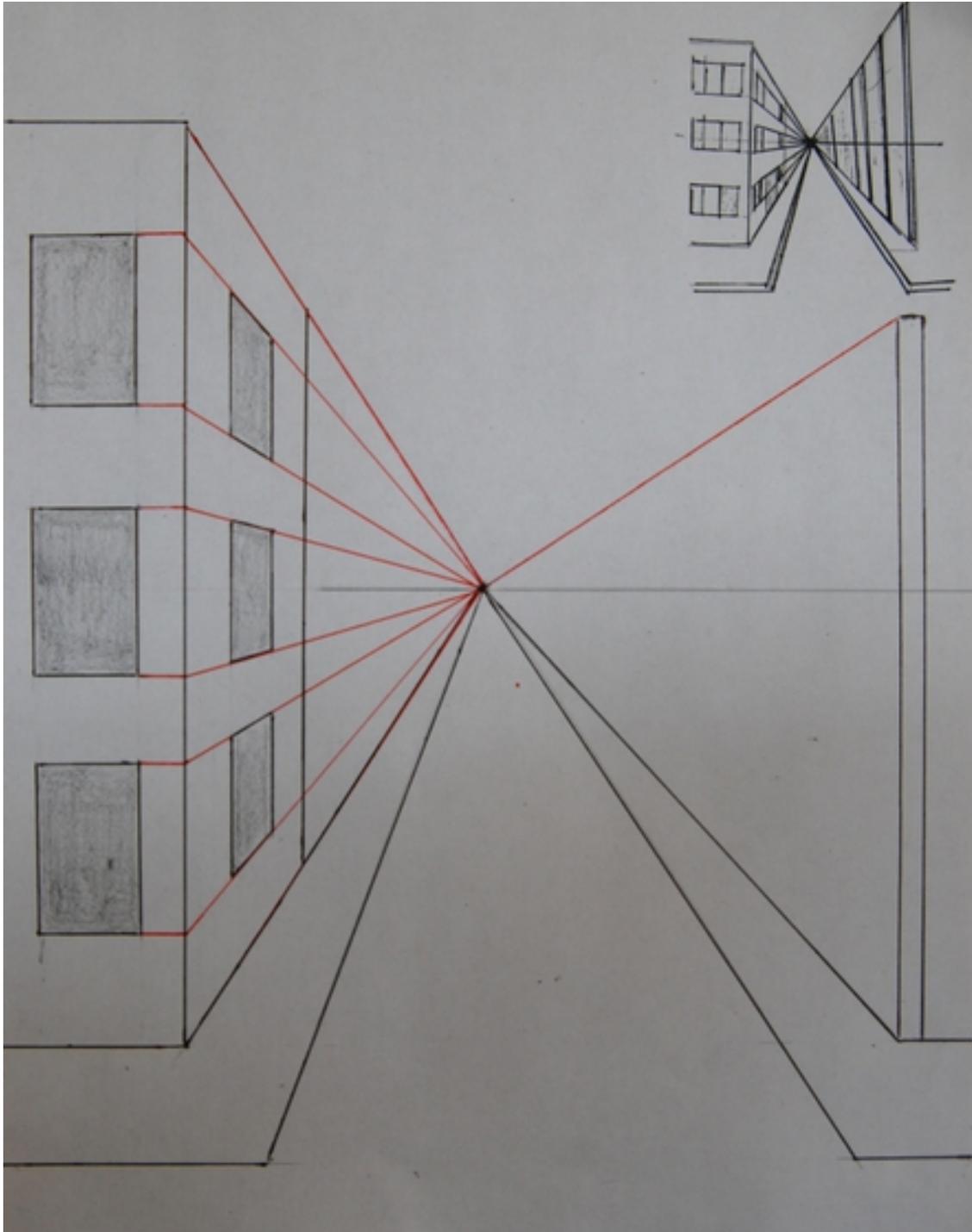
A diagonal line is drawn from the vanishing point to the top of the telephone pole on the left. Two additional poles are drawn between the diagonal lines of the sidewalk and the line to the top of the pole on the left. The pole on the left is wider, the middle pole thinner and the last pole has no width. The

right side of the building and telephone poles are shaded with cast shadows applied indicating the light source is from the left.

Measuring/ Geometric Still Life

The concepts used in creating the illusion of space in a two dimensional picture plane of the landscape and cityscape can be applied to the smaller depth of field of the still life. The artist Vincent Van Gogh defines drawing as careful and precise measuring. In the still life drawing space and object size will be created through measurements.

A very simple geometric still life of a sphere and cone has been chosen. The students must select the small sphere as the object used to set the scale and do all the measurements from.

The first step is to determine where the bottom of the cone is in relationship to the sphere. A horizontal line is drawn at the base of the cone through the sphere. The horizontal line is about one third of the way up from the bottom of the sphere. A vertical line is drawn where the left diagonal edge of the cone comes in contact with the sphere about one third of the way in from the right edge of the sphere. Next draw a vertical line down from the center point of the cone. With these three lines the position of the cone in relationship to the sphere is established.

Next the size of the sphere will be used to measure the height and width of the cone making the size of the sphere the unit of measurement. A sighting stick will be used to record the size of the sphere and then be used to measure the cone. The point of the sighting stick (wooden skewer) is placed at the top of the sphere and a red line is drawn on the sighting stick where it intersects the bottom of the sphere.

The sighting stick is moved to the right and placed over the center vertical line of the cone with the red line on the sighting stick placed on the intersection of the horizontal and vertical line. A small horizontal line is drawn on the cone at the tip of the sighting stick indicating one sphere unit of measurement from the base of the cone to the tip of the sighting stick. The sighting stick is moved up the vertical line until the red line on the sighting stick is on top of the small horizontal line drawn on the cone. Another small horizontal line is drawn on the cone at the point of the sighting stick. This process of measuring is repeated until the full height of the cone is measured.
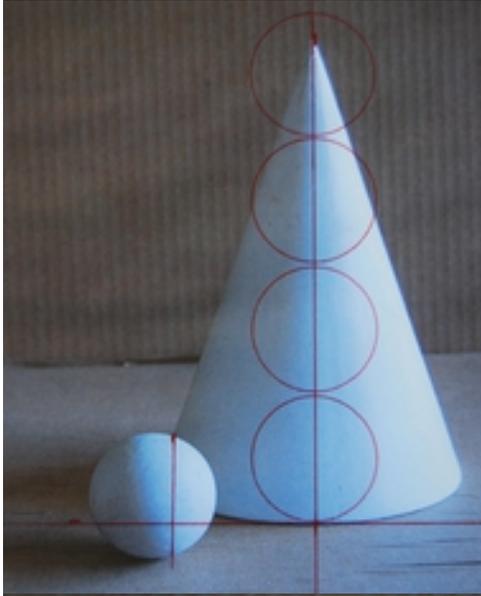
For purposes of visual clarity I have switched to drawing circles that are the same size as the sphere to indicate that the cone is 3 ¾ spheres tall.

The width of the cone must be measured by first extending the left side of the cone through the sphere down to the horizontal base line of the cone. Draw the curve of the cone's base through the sphere to locate the bottom left edge of the cone and place a vertical line at that point. From where the vertical line from the left bottom edge of the cones intersects the horizontal base line of the cone use the sighting stick to measure the width of the cone. The cone is 2 ½ spheres wide.
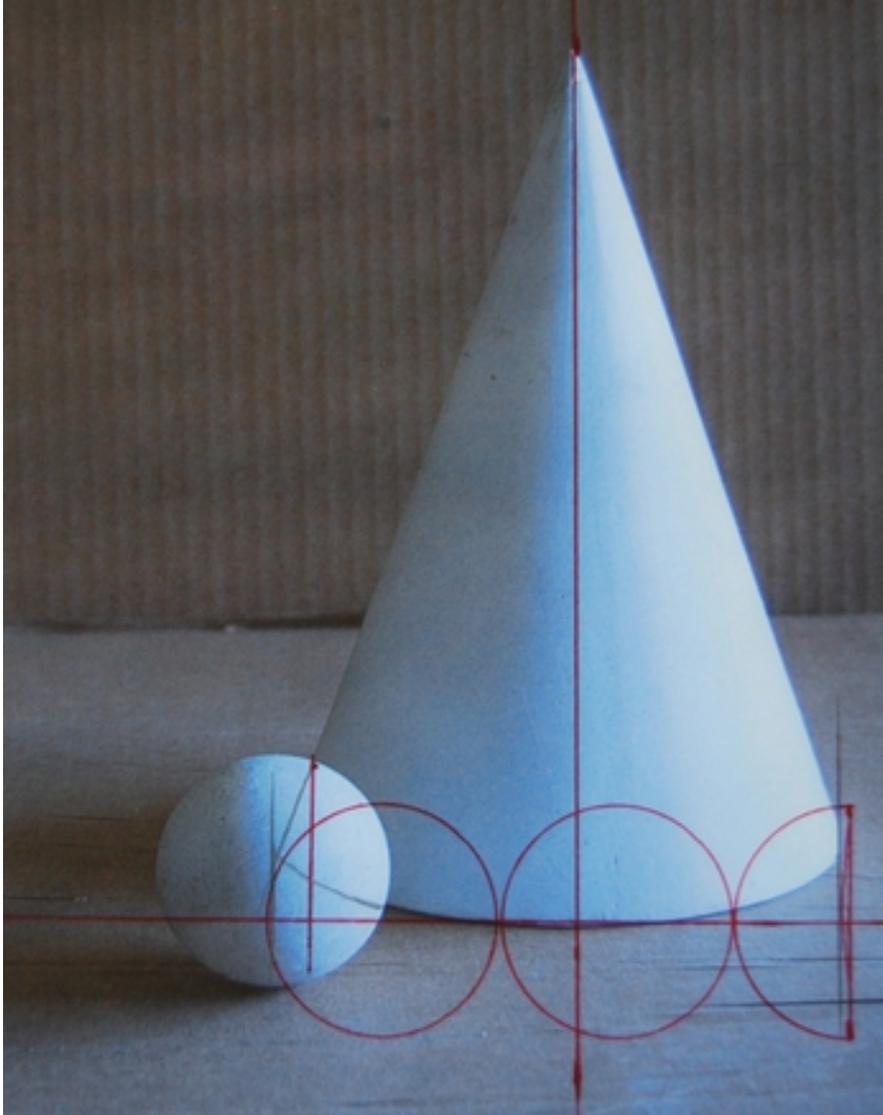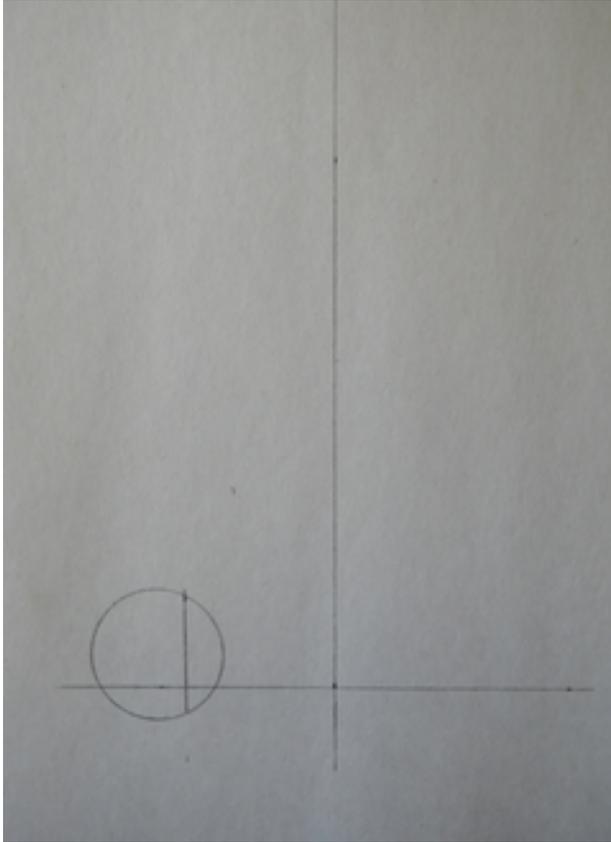
The first step in drawing the geometric still life is to draw a circle for the sphere. This becomes the scale or measurement used to measure the cone. The circle can be any size but it can not be so large that there isn't enough space in the picture plane to draw the cone at 3 ¾ spheres tall. After drawing the sphere draw a horizontal line aproxomately 1/3 of the way up from the bottom of the sphere. Next draw a vertical line 1/3 of the way in from the right side of the sphere. The vertical line for the center of the cone is approxamately 2/3 of a spheres length from the right edge of the sphere to the center line of the cone. Measure 2/3 of a sphere from the right edge of the sphere and draw a verticle line marking the center line of the cone.

Place the point of the sighting stick on the top of the drawn circle and place a mark on the sighting stick where it intersects the bottom of the circle. Move the sighting stick to the vertical line of the center of the cone and measure 3 ¾ circles up from the cone base line.
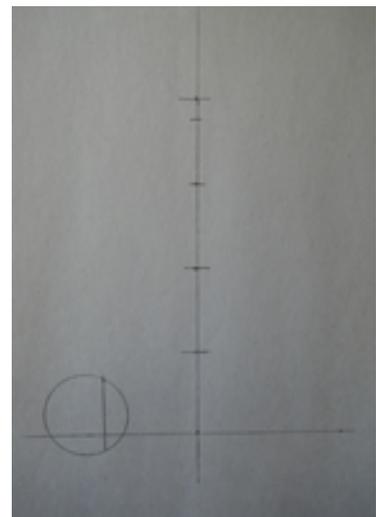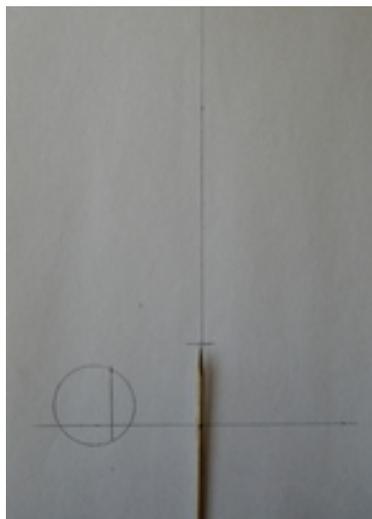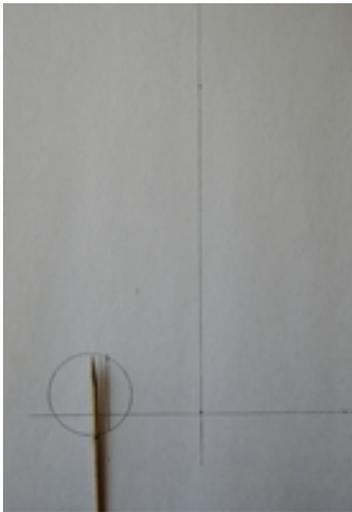

Draw a diagonal line from the top of the cone to where the vertical line is drawn on the circle and continue the diagonal line to the horizontal base line of the cone. Draw a curved line from the base line of the cone to form the left bottom edge of the cone at the intersection of the curved line and diagonal line of the left side of the
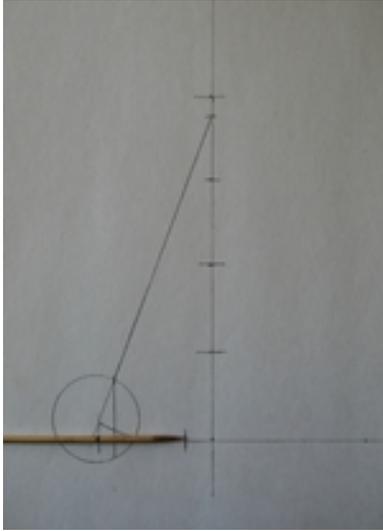
cone. Place the one sphere measurement line on the sighting stick on the bottom left corner of the cone and measure 2 ½ cones to the right.

Next draw a diagonal line from the top of the cone to the measuring mark that indicates the right bottom edge of the cone. Round off the base, draw a horizontal line to indicate a tabe line and then shade the geometric forms and cast shadows.
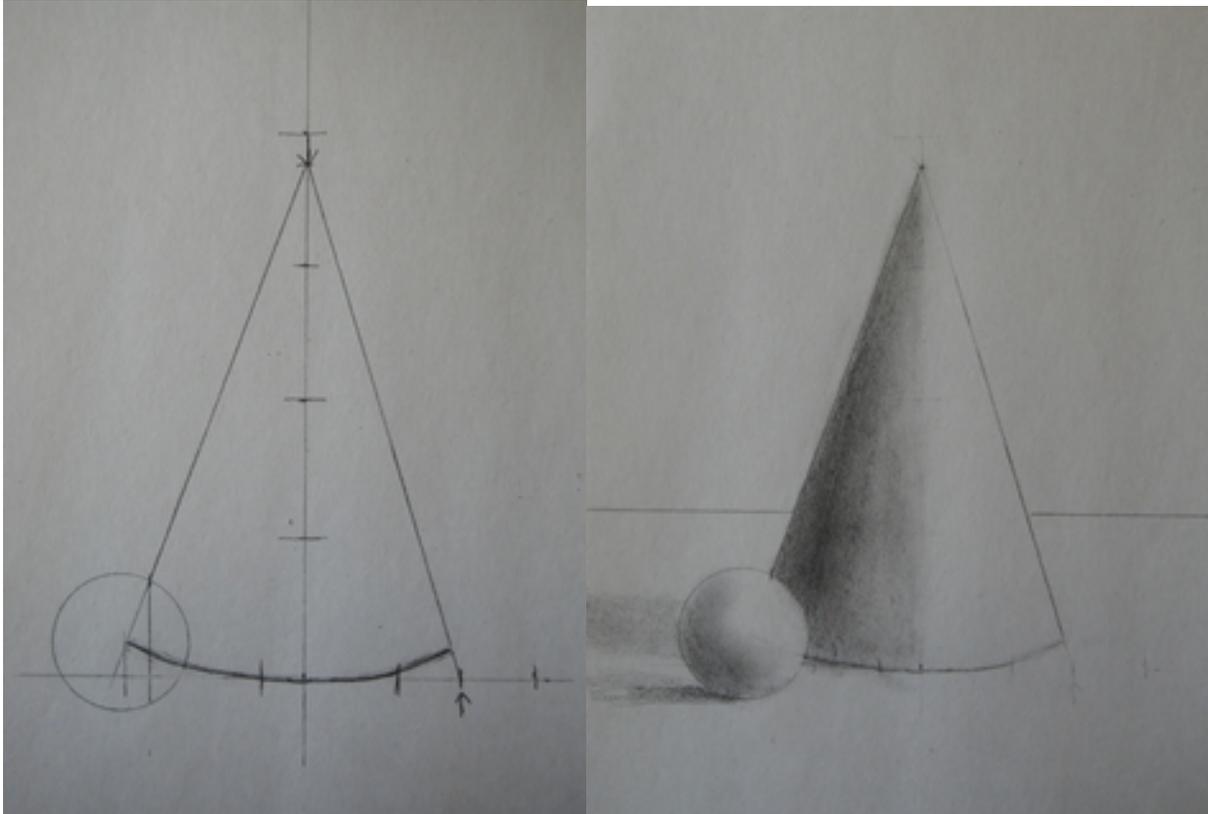
The idea of measuring in drawing is a foreign concept to most people. It is much easier for them to subscribe to the notion that art is created through talented rather than knowledgeable individuals. With applied knowledge all individuals can draw and with practice they can become skillful and competent in production practices. The measuring still life assignment is a transition point where drawing accuracy and skill is graded equally with the understanding of the assignments fundamental concepts. With students growing confidence in drawing skill and higher drawing expectations elementry level drawing skill is no longer acceptable. Students must now fully apply learned measuring and production techniques. The geometric still life establishes the concept of measured proportion. Measuring insures that the size of the cone is in the correct proportion to the sphere. In measuring and drawing simple objects if the measuring is incorrect the objects can still look correct. However, mismeasurements in complex objects such as the human face and figure is easily detected and the viewer will always focus on what is incorrect in a drawing rather that what was done correctly.

Portraiture: measuring and drawing the face

Above are three portraiture drawing by 9th graders. These drawings indicate to me that the last time they drew the human head was in elementary school. I could also ask any non-artist adult to draw the human head and I would receive the same results as above. The students were never involved in an art learning activity and their drawings reflect their skill and visual knowledge at the point when they stopped drawing. What is lacking in all three drawing is the measurements of correct proportions and the structure of facial features. What is present in these drawing is their misconceptions about the proportions of the face that must be forgotten before the correcting knowledge can be applied. With the lack of drawing skill and knowledge demonstrated above the face will have to broken down into the study of individual features which will be placed on an existing structure so they can see and understand the essential correctness of measured proportions.

The starting point is learning to draw the eyes in the correct position. The most common misconception is that the hair line is the top of the head. The hair actly begins on the front plane of the face and the top of the head is above the hair line. This is why all three drawing above has the eyes high on the forehead. The positions of the eyes are exactly in the middle of the head half the distance from the top of the head to the bottom of the chin. The head is also five eye widths wide with one eye width between the eyes. This knowledge clarifies why the drawings of the eyes above are incorrect.

The eyes are reduced to a simple almond shape and developed over five steps of instruction. It is at this point of instruction that the one eye widths between the eyes is emphasized.
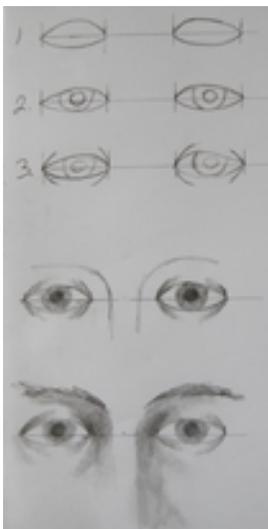

Below left is the worksheet students are to draw the eyes on. It has five spaces marked off for the width of the head for correct positioning of the eyes. There is a dotted line to indicate where the hair line would begin and a curved horizontal line to indicate the correct proportional position of the eyes half the distance from the top of the head to the chin. The drawing on the right has the almond shaped eyes with eyelids drawn.
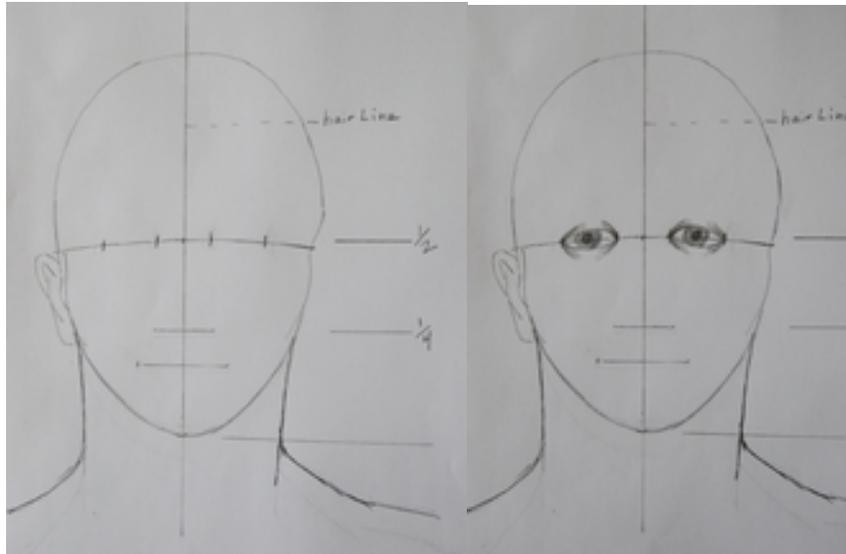
The next facial feature to be drawin is the nose which is the most difficult feature to translate into a three dimentional representation on the flat picture plane. Once again I reduce the nose to a series of simple shapes drawn in four steps.

In the drawing on the left the nose begins with a triangle at the base of the nose, a circle for the ball of the nose, two vertical lines extending up from the ball of the nose to construct the bridge of the nose and two verticle lines extending up from the right and left points of the trangle to form the side planes of the nose.
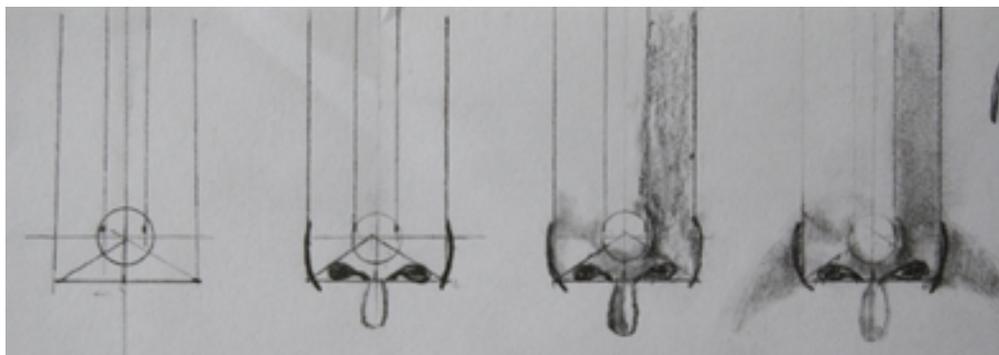

In the second drawing form the left two comas placed sideways with tails to the center are placed within the triangle to form the openings for the nostrals. Two parentheses are placed on the right and left side extending slightly below and above the triangle and a teardrop shape is placed extending below the nose. I use simple geometric shapes and words associated with shapes the students are already familiar with such as comas and parentheses. Artists draw through shape recognition of the parts to construct a complex whole. Shading is added to the two drawing on the right. The triangle becomes the undercut or downward facing plane of the nose.
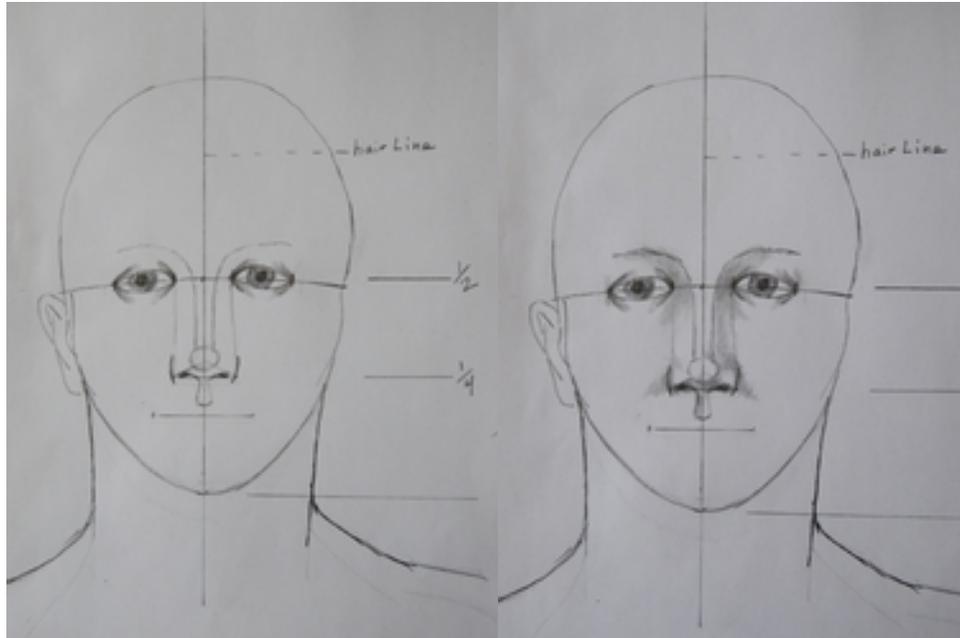
The nose is drawn on the line that is one half the distance between the eyes and the bottom of the chin or ¼ the distance from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head. In this stage the bridge of the nose is extened up to form the bridge of the forehead and eyebrows.

There are drawing exercises I have students practice to draw the mouth and when they are completed the students add the mouth to their composit drawing on the bottom line that is 1/3 the distance down between the nose and chin. The upper lip is a downward facing plane and is always in shadow and looks

darker than the upward facing plane of the lower lip that is always lighter. The ear is drawn on the right and I suggest students draw a half heart shape to represent the ear.
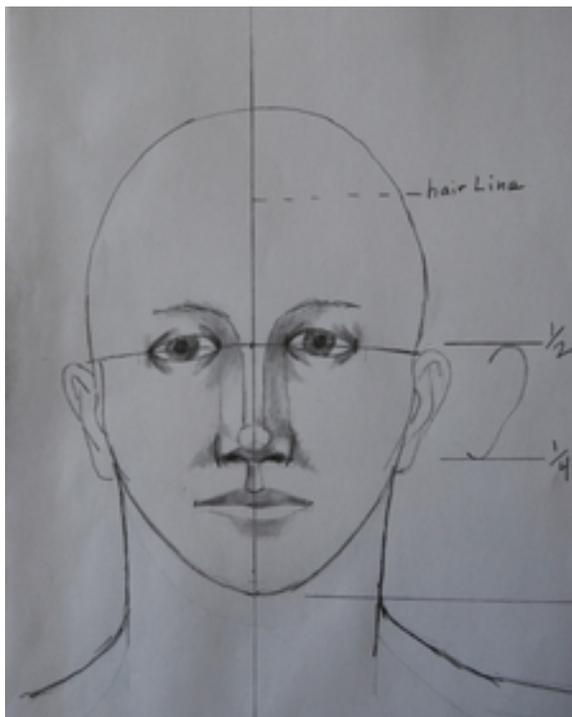
Once this drawing is completed I have the students draw the head on a blank sheet of paper being responsible for all of their own measurements to correctly draw the head. Students are taught how to read rulers and instructed to make the head size five inches wide by seven inches in height.

The three drawings below are sucessful examples of student's measured drawings. On one of my demonstration drawings I applied the side planes of the face so students could see how close their machanical drawings of the face could be easily transformed into a more three demensional representation of the human head. The three students below applied the applications of the side planes to their portrait drawings.

In the three drawing above the students were able to replace their misconceptions with new knowledge on the the proportion and construction of the human head. The students whose work is represented above were able to accept art as a learning activity.   In the three drawings below you see some of the construction techniques applied however the most prevelent misconception of the eyes high on the forehead was not forgotten. In the drawings below previously held misconcepts takes priority over learning and the students still view the hair line as the top of the head and fail to grasp the importance of measuring in representational figurative art. I presume that since the measurements and forms are simple, student failure is likely formed by their inability to change their preconceptions about drawing and drawing the human head. For most students their last participation in visual art was in elementary or a limited junior high program where art was an activity and all forms of production were accepted and encouraged regardless of student developmental level. The concept of a drawing being right or wrong is foreign to their art experiences and they now must adjust to the new concept that art is not just participating and doing but requires learning.

**Figure drawing: Measuring and drawing the body.**

The three drawing above were typical of students skill and knowledge before studying the forms and porportions of the human figure. The two figures on the left are at a 6th grade developmental level while the figure on the right is typical of individuals who are practiced in anamation.
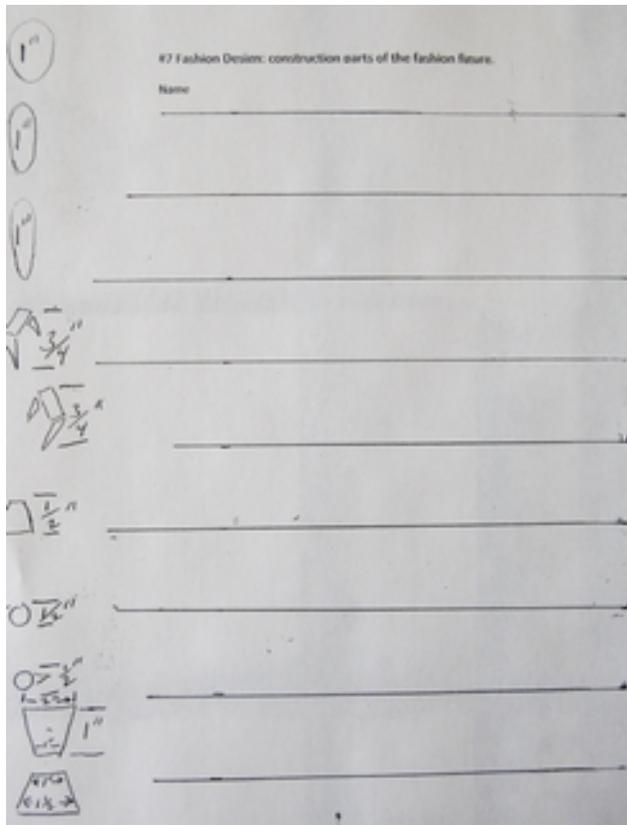
In order to draw the complex human form students must first break the figure down into small units of basic shapes. The students are first asked to draw the basic shapes of the body parts in the exact size that will be required in their figure drawings. The empasis is on the size and shape of the form and not on drawing a human figure. When the students can draw all the simple forms then they understand that they are capable of drawing a complete human figure.

The head is used as the unit of measurement to measure the human figure similar to the way the sphere was used to measure in the geometric still life drawing. I require the head size to be one inch long and the figure the students will draw will be eight heads tall.

The worksheet on the left has a small scale printed example of the eight head length figure with clearly defined and simplified shapes of the
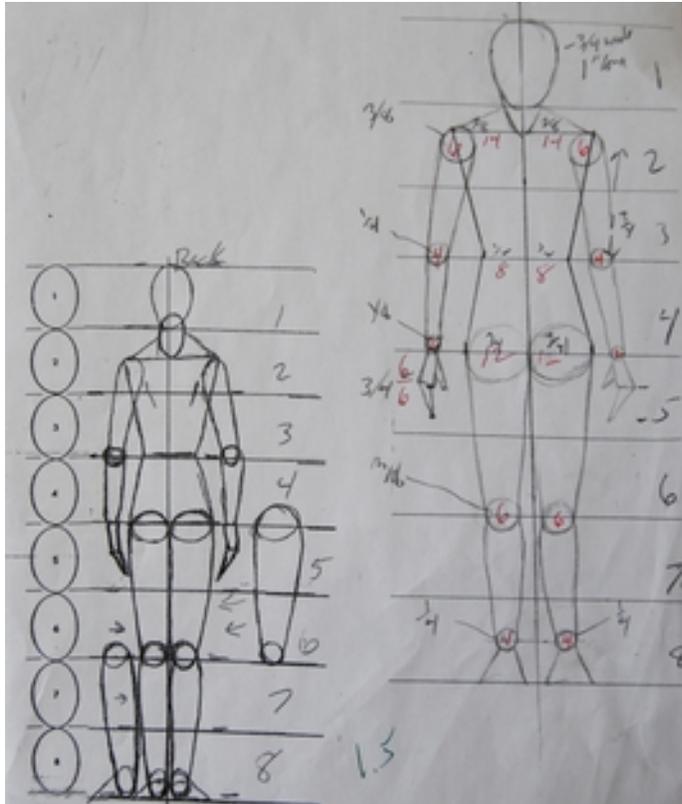
body parts. On the right side of the worksheet there are eight one inch spaces separated by horizontal lines for the students to draw their eight head length figure. The printed figure on the left is the back view and the drawing on the right is of the front view. The numbers in red indicate the diameter of the circles at the joints, width of the sholders,waist and hips in sixteenths of an inch using a standard ruler.

Below are examples of student's figure drawings. The drawings on the left of each page are the student's learned machanical drawings of the human figure and the drawings on the right illustrate the student's misconceptions drawn prior to their study of the figure.
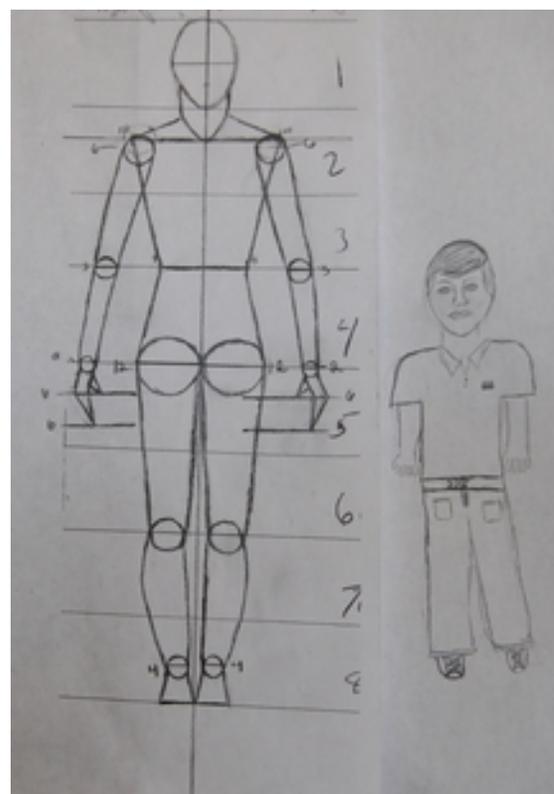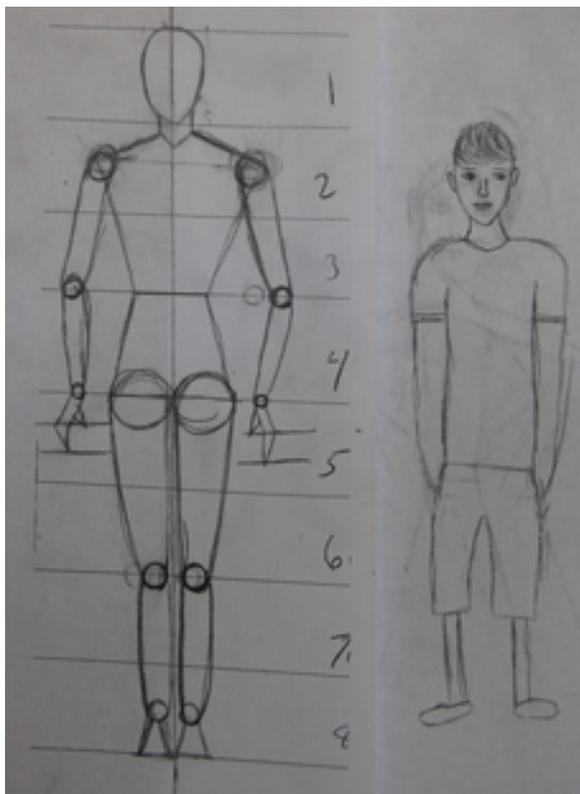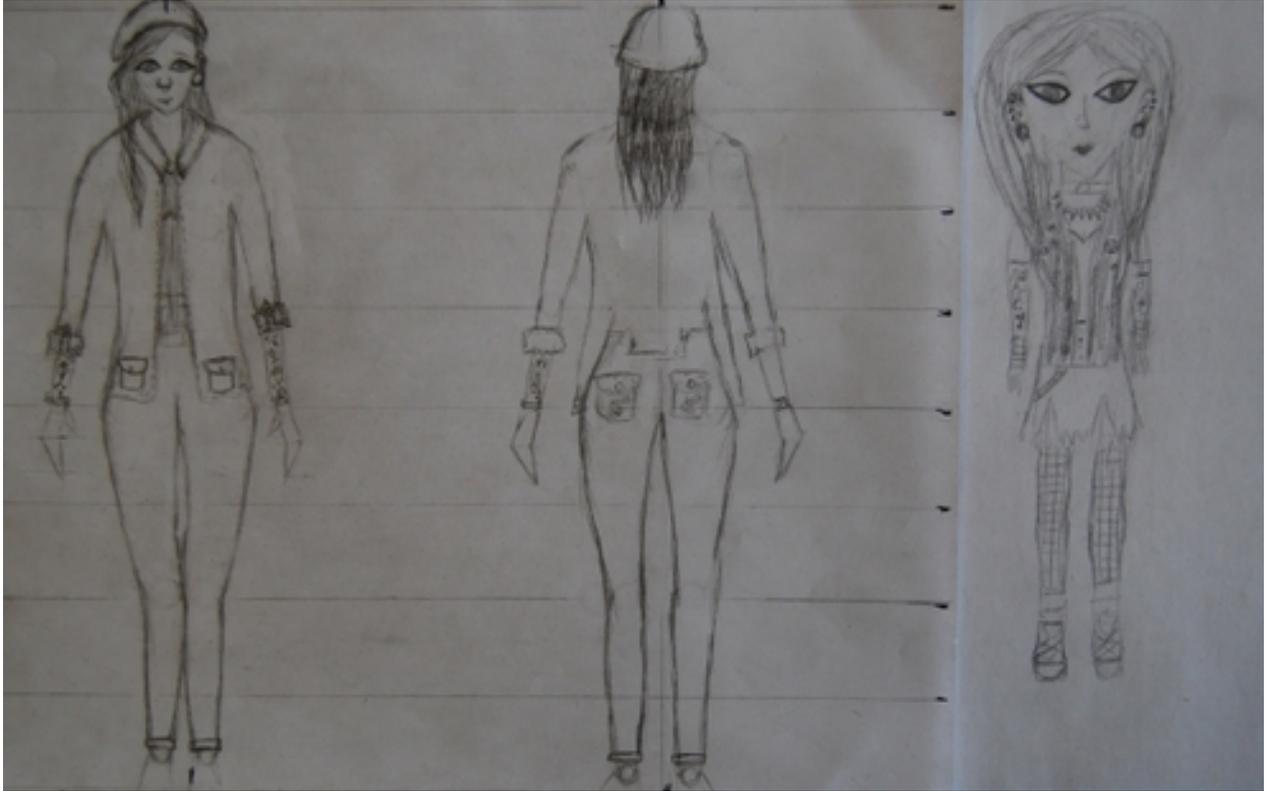
The fashion designs represented by the front and back view of the figure in the drawings above are very stiff and machanical representations of the human form. The emphasis is placed on the correct form and proportions of the overall figure. The fashion drawing above shows the student's knowledge of figure drawing before and after their proportion studies of the figure.

The priority of this assignment is not to create "art" but to demonstrate learning which involves

replacing long held misconceptions of the porportions of drawing the human figure. The above drawing demonstraites the desired learning goal of the assignment where misconceptions have been sucessfully replaced by new and informed knowledge.

The drawings on the left indicates limited learning from the pre-drawing to the final figure drawing test. the student is qpplying new construction techniques to old misconceptions which allows them to have short arms

projecting out of the torso, arms and legs of incorrect length and shape, seven head length figure and hands too short.

Since everyone can draw circles, ovals, retangles and triangles I would assume that learning failure is likely from lack of subject interest or the much broader self- persecption of "I can't" that often translates into "I won't" that allows failure to become a choice. This failure has to be directly related to not having a choice as to their participation in a course that they lack the visual intelligence and interest to be sucessful in. In a scholastic institution it is expected to be forced into math, english and science classes that have had a linear progression of content knowledge taught over years of study as compared to the elementary activity experiences of visual art. Visual learning ceased when the student stopped drawing in elementary school and now after years of negectled visual study they are expected as a high school student to resume drawing with their elementary level visual education skills. Imagine having a third grader go into a coma for six years and then wake up and be placed in 9th grade high school classes with their third grade education. The situation would be awkward, difficult and often embarrising which is what some 9th graders experience in a mandatory art class that they would wisely choose to avoide if they had a choice.

Learning requires the self-discipline of the ability to maintain a directed focus on learning activities. Self-discipline is directed by self-interest and when the student's interest is limited learning is negligible. I suspect that the drawing above is a product of un-sustained focus caused by lack of subject interest.
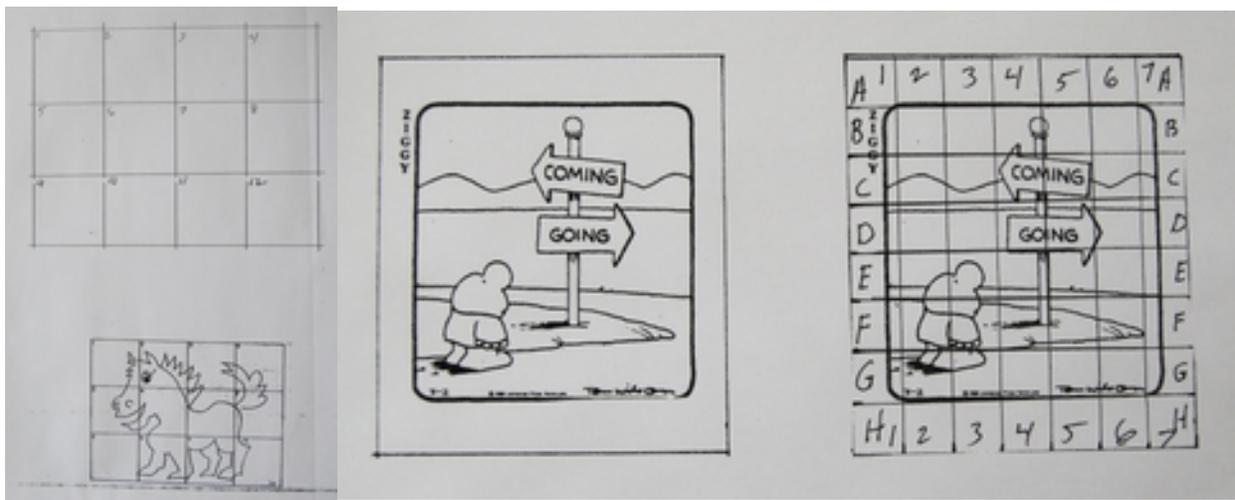
The final assignment in the basic art course requires focused concentration. Students are given a gridded drawing and are required to replicate the drawing in a larger scale gridded answer/drawing sheet.

Students must not focus on the whole drawing but rather narrow their focused concentration on just one square. Once one square is completed they move on to the next square until the entire image has been replicated at a larger scale. Errors in the drawings will occur in the areas where the students are too focused on the whole rather than the content of one square. The inability to focus on just one square represents a lapse in concentration which results in errors. The more complex the content is in a square the more concentration it will require. I have heard it explained that mental concentration is like

going to the bank and making a withdrawal. There is a limit to how much one can withdraw in a day. Intense concentration and focus uses a lot of energy and causes mental fatigue. If a student begins the assignment fatigued they haven't the energy for the focus necessary to be successful in their drawings. If the students have a short attention span or disinterested in the subject or a combination of both, then errors will occur in the most difficult squares where they lose concentration in the drawing.

I experience exactly the same lapse of concentration in the most challenging parts of my painting and drawings. I will reach a point where my mind stops working and the eyes stop focusing. Art production requires physical and mental energy and any time that I am physically tired art production is difficult and laborious and the most challenging parts of my work cannot be attempted without sufficient energy. I am able to step back, restore energy and refocus my efforts because of my intense interest in visual art and my desire to succeed in each work I produce.

My lapses in concentration occur in other activities often interrupted by my imagination and day dreams. But they also occur during focused activities such as reading where my mind, like in painting, will reach a point of mental fatigue where the mind stops processing and the eyes stops seeing and words no longer have a sequential meaning.   When this occurs I have to stop reading and begin another day. The reason I continue reading is because of my intense interest of what I am reading which directly affects my artistic work.

The impetus to get through mental fatigue and restore focus and concentration is the self-interests of the individual. I succeed because what I do in art is essential to me while a student may fail because the task is of little interest and importance to them. The basic tenet of learning is self-interest and self-discipline.


The drawing on top is by a student who has an interest in art and is interested in joining the Art Academy in her sophomore year. She succeeded because she had the self-disciplined focus and the desire to learn and improve her production skills in an area of study that is of high priority to her personal interests.
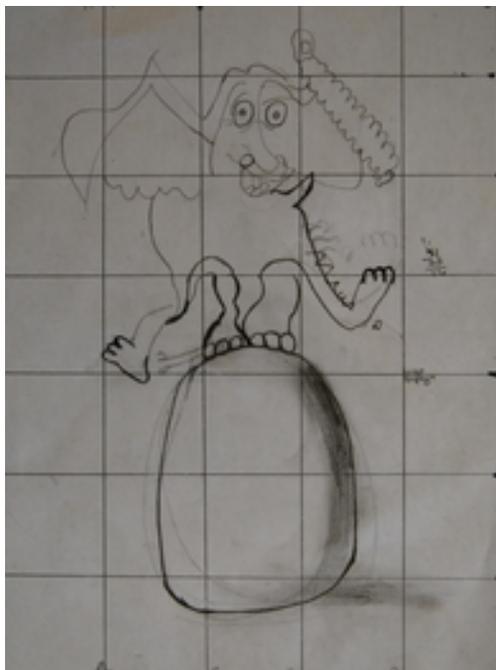
The drawing on the left failed because of her inability to maintain focus. Her starting point was the left ear and it is relatively well drawn. Her concentration diminished from that point and she was no longer focusing on single squares but rather looking at the whole elephant and drawing to simply complete the assignment. The mind and eyes were not working and the drawings correctness was not a

concern of the student. The drawing was her second attempt at the assignment and represents the point where she was resigned to believing she couldn't draw the elephant nor complete the assignment correctly.

The assignment is less about drawing skill and more about the ability to focus. The top drawing was the response to focused interest while the bottom drawing represents the inability to focus and lack of subject interest.
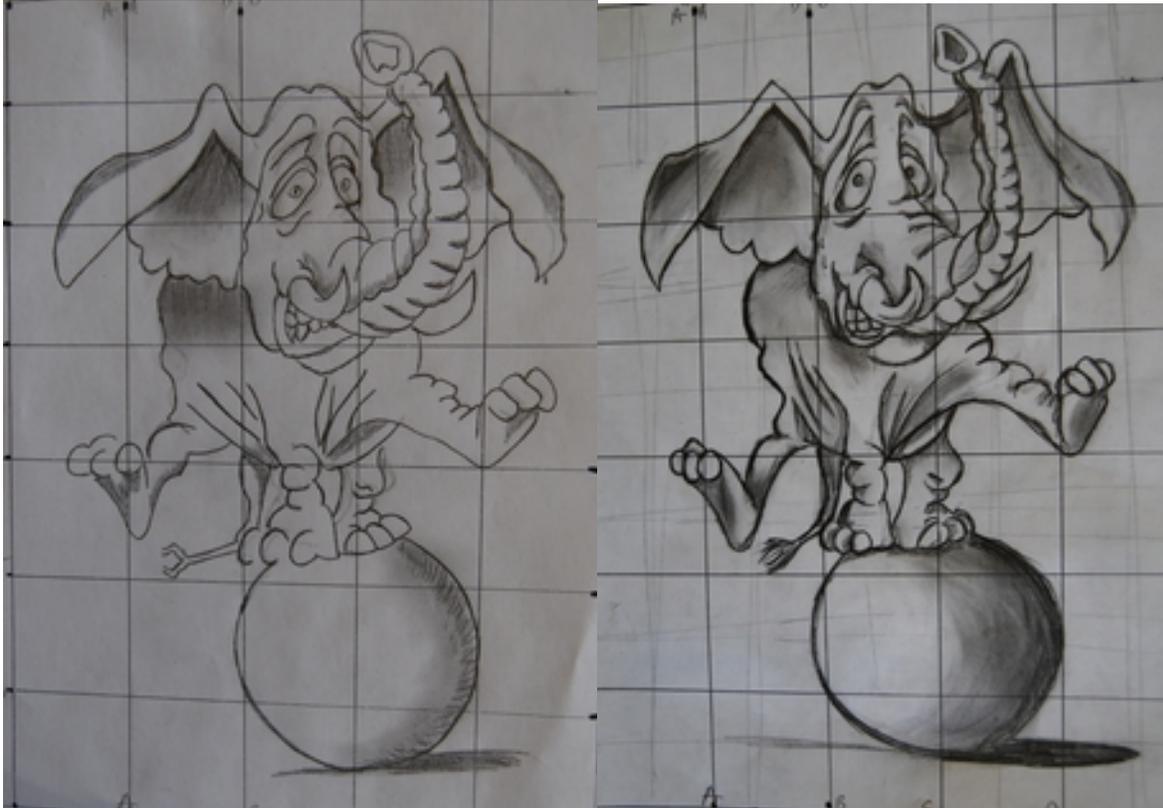
The student who did the drawing above left has very little interest in art but has a very high interest for academic success and has always been extremely focused and attentive to learning in all of her assignments. The student who did the drawing above right has a high interest in animation and it shows in the expressive drawing quality of the elephant's face. The student's interests are very different and both have different reasons for obtaining a successful outcome in the assignment and in the course. Predictably the student's skills on the left will erode through disuse while the student's practiced skills on the right will be maintained through her special interest in animation. What they both have in common is the ability for the sustained focused concentration that is essential for the problem solving associated with learning skills. Learning is a focused activity and there can be no learning without the attentive focus of the student.

In the drawing on the left the student disregarded the instructions, didn't use the measured grid system and drew the assignment as if drawing on a blank sheet of paper. In this case the students lacks the self-discipline and subject interest to do the assignment correctly. The student is drawing in response to their misconceptions of "I can't draw" and drawing is not measuring or breaking the whole down into smaller manageable units to construct the whole image. This drawing demonstrates the student lacks the understanding of the learning process not just in art but in all discipline areas of study. In working in a small school system it is easy to see and know who is academically challenged and those students who are having difficulties in their academic courses are also doing poorly in the basic art class. The drawings of those having academic difficulties indicate what they all lack is the ability of a sustained focused concentration necessary for learning. They will do learning activities without learning and when provided with the answers they won't learn from them but will revert back and maintain their previously held misconceptions. The drawing to the left is not drawing it is the "I can't draw" which is part of the "I can't" that may be applied to all learning activities. Academic failure can make one resigned to the acceptance of failure which I personally know and understand from of my own educational experiences. I know this student and others who perform similar to her do not have the spatial/visual intelligence or interest necessary to be successful in visual art. I also know based on my own academic failures that this student and every student has an intelligence that is not being measured by a narrow focused system of education. I feel the key to unlocking an individual's learning potential is rooted in their intelligence. Finding how they are intelligent will lead to finding their self-discipline which they may be able to apply to all learning disciplines. The unfortunate aspect of our education system is that if a student's intelligence isn't within our narrow search there isn't much individual assistance that can be offered in the large class sizes of a mass production system. I did not fit into the education system and had to learn how to educate myself. To be successful I assume that students who struggle to learn in standardized systems will also have to learn how to educate themselves to be successful in their lives. This may mean abandoning our narrow definition of the word education. Everyone who is successful is educated and their education may come from outside of scholastic institutions.

Summary

Adolescents in the process of transitioning into young adults are confronted by a basic art course that makes it mandatory for them to reveal their childish understanding of a complex visual symbol system that most had completely abandoned years earlier. If you can't sing you don't sing in public. If you have difficulty reading and stumble over words you do everything you can do to avoid reading publically aloud. If you don't draw you don't draw in public or in a crowded classroom because you are embarrassed by your child-like drawings. They have accepted the fact that they cannot draw and their acceptance of this fact becomes the first barrier that must be overcome before learning can occur.

The destruction of the "I can't draw" barrier begins by getting them to understand that they have been drawing their entire academic life. The elements of writing are the same elements of drawing. They both require the same assortment and variety of lines to make images the mind can translate into known experiences and concepts. What is not understood by the students is that they have never had any formal training in visual art and that training in art is similar to the formal training in learning how to write which they have all been successful at accomplishing. This again is perception and misconception. Students think of writing as learning and art as talent and never as learning. Basic art becomes about changing their misconception that art, like every academic study requires practiced learning developing many of the same skills the students used while learning how to write. They have studied and practiced a language notation system and they need to understand that this same experience of learning is precisely what must be done in art and that is to study and to practice the visual notation system.

Learning is changing a way a person thinks and so the basic art course is not about art but about changing the way students think about their preconceptions of their own limitations. The students will not produce art in this course just like they have not produced art in their English language courses. All that is possible in the basic art course is learning. Learning can occur only if the students are successful in forgetting and overcoming the limitations of their preconceptions which is always centered on their misconception of talent and misunderstand the learning necessary to be successful in all endeavors. Education is the key to success and art education, the mastering of the visual symbol system, is how one becomes successful in art.