

Lesson Plan: The Art of the Story - Designing a Personal Tattoo

Materials Needed:

- Sketchbook or several sheets of unlined paper
- Pencils (a standard #2 and ideally a softer one like a 4B or 6B for shading)
- Fine-tipped black pens or markers (like a Sharpie Pen or Micron pens)
- Eraser
- Optional: Colored pencils, markers, or watercolor paints
- Optional: Access to the internet for visual research (with guidance)
- Optional: Tracing paper

Lesson Overview

Subject: Visual Arts

Grade Level: Middle School (Age 13)

Time Allotment: 90-120 minutes (can be split into two sessions)

This lesson focuses on the creative process of designing a tattoo, treating it as a form of personal storytelling and symbolic art. The goal is not to encourage getting a tattoo, but to use the art form as a vehicle for self-expression, critical thinking, and applying core principles of design.

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- **Analyze** how symbols and imagery are used to convey meaning in visual art.
- **Brainstorm and sketch** multiple ideas that represent a personal value, memory, or interest.
- **Apply** basic design principles (like line, balance, and flow) to develop a unique and cohesive final tattoo design.
- **Articulate** the meaning behind their design choices in a brief artist's statement.

2. Alignment with Art Standards

This lesson aligns with National Core Arts Standards, specifically:

- **Creating (VA:Cr2.1.8a):** Experiment with and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches.
- **Presenting (VA:Pr4.1.7a):** Analyze why and how an artist's personal experiences influence the creation of artwork.
- **Connecting (VA:Cn11.1.8a):** Distinguish among different art forms and identify how artists use them to communicate stories or ideas.

3. Instructional Strategies & Lesson Activities

Part 1: The Spark - What Makes a Tattoo Meaningful? (15-20 minutes)

- **Introduction (Discussion):** Start with a conversation. "Why do people get tattoos? What

makes a design more than just a picture on the skin?" Discuss how tattoos can mark important life events, honor loved ones, or represent personal beliefs.

- **Style Exploration (Research):** Briefly look at different tattoo styles online or in books. Point out key features:
 - **American Traditional:** Bold black lines, simple color palette.
 - **Geometric:** Uses shapes, lines, and patterns.
 - **Watercolor:** Mimics the soft, blended look of watercolor paint.
 - **Illustrative:** Looks like a detailed drawing or illustration.
- **Teacher Guidance:** Ask, "Which styles do you find most interesting? What do you notice about the lines or shading in each one?" This helps the student start thinking like a designer.

Part 2: The Symbolism Mind Map (20-30 minutes)

- **Brainstorming Core Ideas:** Ask the student to choose one central theme for their design. It could be a favorite hobby (gaming, reading), a core value (courage, creativity), a cherished memory, or an important relationship (family, friendship).
- **Creating the Mind Map:**
 1. Write the central theme in the middle of a blank page and circle it. (e.g., "Family")
 2. Branching out from the center, write down related words and ideas. (e.g., for "Family," branches could be "Strength," "Roots," "Love," "Protection.")
 3. From those words, brainstorm visual symbols. What objects, animals, or abstract shapes represent these ideas?
 - *Strength* → Oak Tree, Mountain, Bear
 - *Roots* → Tree roots, Anchor, a specific house
 - *Love* → Heart (how can we make it unique?), two hands holding, a specific flower
- **Goal:** This activity generates a rich library of personal symbols to pull from, moving beyond generic clip art and fostering a deeper, more creative connection to the final design.

Part 3: The Design Studio - From Scribble to Statement (45-60 minutes)

- **Thumbnail Sketches (Rapid Ideation):** Using the mind map, the student should draw at least 5-10 small, quick sketches (about 2x2 inches) in their sketchbook. The goal is to explore different combinations of symbols without worrying about perfection. Encourage experimenting with composition. How can the bear and the oak tree fit together?
- **Choosing the Best Concept:** Review the thumbnails together. Ask, "Which sketch feels the most balanced? Which one tells the story most clearly?" The student selects their strongest concept to develop further.
- **Refining the Draft:** On a new sheet of paper, the student creates a larger, more detailed drawing of their chosen concept. During this phase, introduce key design principles:
 - **Line Weight:** "Try making the outer lines thicker and the inner detail lines thinner. See how that makes the design 'pop'?"
 - **Balance & Flow:** "Imagine this on an arm or a shoulder. Does the design flow naturally? Is it visually balanced, or is everything crowded on one side?"
 - **Negative Space:** Point out the empty spaces around and within the drawing. "Is the negative space interesting? It's just as important as the lines themselves."
- **Finalizing the Piece (Inking):** Once the pencil sketch is complete, the student can use the fine-tipped black pens to create the final line work. Tracing paper can be used to transfer a clean version if the sketch is messy. They can then erase the pencil lines. Adding color or shading is an optional final step.

4. Differentiation and Inclusivity

- **For Support:** Provide a pre-made worksheet of common symbols and their meanings to help jumpstart the mind-mapping process. Offer simple shape templates (circles, triangles) that can be incorporated into the design.

- **For an Advanced Challenge:** Challenge the student to design a piece that incorporates text or a quote in a creative way. They could also be tasked with creating two separate but related designs (like a matching pair) or designing a piece specifically to fit the contours of a particular body part (e.g., a snake that wraps around an arm).
- **Inclusivity:** The focus on personal symbolism makes this lesson inherently inclusive, as it honors the student's unique background, culture, and interests. Ensure any visual examples shown represent a diverse range of cultural art styles.

5. Assessment Methods

- **Formative (Ongoing):**
 - Observe the mind-mapping process to see the depth of brainstorming.
 - Review the thumbnail sketches to check for variety and experimentation.
 - Ask guiding questions throughout the drawing process to assess their understanding of design principles ("Why did you choose to make that line so bold?").
- **Summative (Final Evaluation):**
 - **The Final Design:** Evaluate the artwork based on completion, application of design principles (line, balance), and visual clarity.
 - **Artist's Statement:** The student writes 3-5 sentences explaining their final design. This is the most important part of the assessment. The statement should answer:
 1. What is the central theme of your design?
 2. What key symbols did you use and what do they mean to you?
 3. Why did you choose this particular style or composition?

6. Closure and Reflection (10 minutes)

Have the student present their final design and read their artist's statement aloud. End with a reflective conversation:

- "What was the most challenging part of this process? The most fun?"
- "Did you discover anything new about how you can use art to tell a story?"
- "How is designing something for a specific purpose (like a tattoo) different from just drawing whatever you want?"