A Mighty Fine Line

Visual Arts: Exploring the Elements of Line in Art

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Grade Level	5th – 8th Grade	**Time Frame**	185 min.
Subject	Visual Arts	**Duration**	3 class periods
Course	Oklahoma Young Scholars/Javits, Visual Arts		

Essential Question

How does the element of “line” help create art?

Summary

Students explore the element of line by observing, sketching, and analyzing real-world examples. They begin by sketching lines found in a cog and identifying real-world examples through photography. In class, they analyze their findings, define key terminology, and discuss the artistic significance of lines. Students then apply their understanding by creating original Zentangle designs, incorporating various line qualities and techniques.

Snapshot

Engage

Students view an image of a cog and discuss what it is and how it could be used. They then make a sketch for later use. Initial definitions of the element of line are created in groups and shared with the class.

Explore

Students take pictures of objects that show the element of line and upload these to a Padlet.

Explain

Students watch a video about the element of line, record key vocabulary, and draw simple illustrations. In groups, students are assigned a question about the characteristics of line and share with the class. Students analyze their cog wheel sketches and photos uploaded on Padlet.

Extend

Students are introduced to Zentangles and discuss what they notice and how it relates to the element of line. Students then create their own Zentangle using the DISCO method—Dots, Lines, C-curves, S-curves, and Orbs—within their designs.

Evaluate

Students view class Zentangles through a Galley Walk and then complete a "What? So What? Now What?" writing activity. They then revisit the initial definitions for the element of line and revise and refine it based on their new understandings.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (7th Grade))

VA.CP.1 : Learn and use vocabulary and concepts related to visual arts.
5.VA.CP.1.1 : Discuss approaches and combine concepts to generate innovative ideas for creating art using elements of art and principles of design.

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (7th Grade))

VA.CP.1 : Learn and use vocabulary and concepts related to visual arts.
6.VA.CP.1.1 : Brainstorm approaches and combine concepts to generate innovative ideas for creating art.
6.VA.CP.1.2 : Research and demonstrate diverse methods for approaching the beginning of an artwork.

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (7th Grade))

7.VA.CP.1.1 : Apply knowledge of elements of art (e.g., line, color, form, shape, texture, value, and space) and principles of design (e.g., rhythm, balance, contrast, movement, center of interest, and repetition) to the early stages of the creative process.

Attachments

- Lesson Slides—A Mighty Fine Line.pptx
- The Element of Line Questions for the Explain—A Mighty Fine Line.docx
- The Element of Line Questions for the Explain—A Mighty Fine Line.pdf
- What So What Now What—A Mighty Fine Line.docx
- What So What Now What—A Mighty Fine Line.pdf

Materials

- Lesson slides (attached)
- What? So What? Now What? (attached; one per student)
- The Element of Line Questions for the Explain (attached; one copy cut up by question)
- Sticky Notes (for Gallery review)
- #2 Pencil and notebook and plain (no lines) paper
- Device with camera

20 minutes

Engage

Start by showing students **Slide 4** from the attached **Lesson Slides**. Ask them what they think the image represents and what it could be used for.

Next, provide each student with a piece of plain paper. Have them draw a picture of the cog. Once they have completed their drawings, invite a few students to share how they began their sketches. Use the strategy Think, Pair, Share and have students pair up and discuss the questions listed on **slide 5**:

1. Did you draw any straight lines?
2. Did any of your lines curve?
3. Did any lines connect?
4. Were there any lines that crossed?
5. Did any of your lines go from one point to another?

Students should then join another pair to form small groups. Each group will create an initial definition for the element of line based on their discussions. Show **slide 6** and have groups share their definitions with the class and tape them onto a class chart for reference and comparison.

25 minutes

Explore

Teacher's Prep

Create a Padlet where students can upload their line element photos. Add the link and QR code to slides 7 and 13.

Have students explore their surroundings by taking pictures of objects that demonstrate the element of line. Encourage them to look for examples such as cracks in the sidewalk, brick patterns on buildings, letters on signs, chain-link fences, or patterns on clothing.

Students may use the camera function on their Chromebooks or phones to capture these images. Once they have taken 5 to 6 photos, ask them to select their favorite and upload it to the Padlet **on slide 7.** These images will be revisited in the next part of the lesson.

60 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note

The lesson will focus on and utilize the following line characteristics.

- Long or short
- Straight or curved
- Horizontal, diagonal, vertical
- Zigzag
- Waving or smooth curves
- Looped
- Parallel
- Thick or thin
- Implied lines
- Lines that create depth and dimension (hatching, contour lines)

Using **slide 8**, tell students the seven elements of art—**line, shape, form, space, value, color, and texture**—are the essential building blocks of any artwork. Line is the most fundamental of these elements; without it, the others could not exist. This is why we begin by understanding line.

Before watching the video, provide each student with paper to create individual Elements of Line Anchor Charts. They should include vocabulary and simple drawings for each term. Use this video on **slide 9**, or another of your choice, to introduce the element of line.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=tos2et_JEgA

As students watch the video, have them:

- ***Write*** *the vocabulary terms.*
- ***Draw*** *simple examples of each concept.*

You may need to pause the video periodically or watch it twice to ensure students have time to process the vocabulary and visuals.

After the video, have students work in pairs to share what they recorded on their Elements of Line Anchor Charts.

Next, have a class discussion about, What is a Line? Start the discussion by showing the statement on **slide 10**, *"A line can be thought of as a moving dot."* Ask students:

- How do you visualize this?
- What happens if the dots overlap? *(It creates a solid line.)*
- What happens if the dots don't overlap? *(It creates a dotted line.)*

Have students read through the following questions on **slide 11** and then watch the video again.

- How are lines described? *(Light or heavy, straight or curved, thick or thin, etc.)*
- How can lines be used to outline something? *(Contour lines)*
- How can lines create patterns? *(Doodles, scribbles, textures)*
- How can lines describe an object or idea? *(Cartoons, line art)*
- How do hatching lines create form using value? *(Straight or curved lines for shading)*
- Do lines have a beginning and an end? (Explain your thinking)
- Can lines express emotion? *(How do different types of lines convey different moods?)*

Using the Jigsaw strategy, give each group or team of students a slip of paper with one of the questions. Have students discuss their question and be prepared to share out with the class.

After the discussion, have students revisit the cog wheel **slide 12** they sketched earlier. Using the art vocabulary they just learned, ask students to describe the lines they see in their cog drawings. *Do any of these lines create structure and movement?*

Then, relate the cog to design work by illustrating how a cog in a machine helps maintain a steady flow, just as the use of lines serves a similar function in overall design work. Discuss what happens when a cog is removed or when a line is changed: it disrupts the system. Similarly, if a line is altered in a design, it can affect balance, emphasis, or flow.

Using **slide 13,** direct students to revisit the Padlet where they had uploaded photos of lines found in the real world. Starting with their own image, students should identify the types of lines they see and write these in the comments section under each photo. Have them also comment on their classmates' photos, identifying additional line qualities present in those images.

50 minutes

Extend

Introduce students to Zentangles by showing them one or more examples on **slides 14** and **15**. If working with less experienced students, you may want to start with a simpler design. Regardless of the design you choose, ask students:

- What do you notice about this artwork?
- How does it relate to the vocabulary we've been learning?
- Encourage and guide them to identify Dots, Lines, C-curves, S-curves, and Orbs within the designs.

Introduce the basic types of lines used to create Zentangles using **slide 16**: Dot, Line, C-curve, S-curve, and Orb.

Slide 17 introduces the *Three Steps to Begin A Zentangle*

1. Create Your Frame – Choose a shape to outline your design.
2. Break Up Your Frame – Use 3-4 lines to divide the space into sections.
3. Fill Each Section with a Unique Pattern.

- Add as much detail as possible
- Use pattern sheets as references if needed, and use a variety of patterns
- Create contrast by different line widths

Students now create their own Zentangles. You can allow flexibility in paper choice or provide specific options for size and type. If students need further inspiration, have them explore Zentangle examples from different cultures on the internet.

Teacher's Note

If you need more information about the DISCO pattern of Zentangle, you may want your students to watch part of the video on **slide 18**.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=E2kZGhtpTpQ

30 minutes

Evaluate

After they have completed their Zentangles, have students display their independent work near their seats and participate in a Gallery Walk to view each other's artwork.

Encourage deeper reflection beyond simply recalling their creative process by having students complete a "What? So What? Now What?" writing activity. You can use the attached **What? So What? Now What** handout, or use **slide 19** and have students write "What? So What? Now What?" on their papers, leaving space between each question.

Using **slide 20**, have students revisit the initial definitions created for the element of line. The class should then revise and refine their definition by reflecting on their new understandings and vocabulary related to the element of line.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Anchor charts. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/58
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Gallery walk / carousel. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/118
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Jigsaw. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/179
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Padlet. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/1077
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Think-pair-share. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/139
- K20 Center. (n.d.). What? So what? Now what? Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/95
- Langston, B. (2024, March 6). *Zentangle Basic Elements with the patterns OCSIDOT and DICSO* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oWzUldcg5E
- *Mr. New's Art Class: All About Lines - Understanding the Elements of Art and Design*. (2017, June 1). Mister New [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/tos2et_JEgA?si=qgB-goVTMgypDfop
- Zentangle Images. (2025). FreePik. https://www.freepik.com/free-photos-vectors/zentangle-pattern