

ART · GRADES 3–6

Drawing From Observation

Four progressive lessons

Lesson 1 — Contour drawing (45 min)

WHAT: Drawing only the OUTLINE of an object — no shading, no detail inside. WHY: It teaches careful looking. Most children draw what they THINK something looks like. This lesson trains them to draw what they actually SEE. HOW: Each child has a leaf, a shoe, or a hand to draw. Pencil. They look at the object 80% of the time and the page 20%. Trace the outer edge slowly with their eyes, drawing as they go. Take 20 minutes for one drawing.

Lesson 2 — Blind contour (45 min)

WHAT: Same object, but DON'T look at the page at all. Eyes stay on the object the whole time. WHY: Forces total focus on observation. The result is usually wonky and funny — and surprisingly accurate in detail. HOW: Tape paper to the desk so it doesn't move. Pencil on the paper. Eyes on object. NEVER look down. Draw for 5 minutes. Look at result — laugh. Now do another, this time allowing one peek every 30 seconds. Notice improvement.

Lesson 3 — Light and shade (60 min)

WHAT: Adding tonal value to a drawing — light, mid, dark. WHY: This is what makes drawings look 3D. Without value, drawings look flat. HOW: Set up an apple under a lamp on one side. Children identify: • HIGHLIGHT (brightest spot — paper white) • LIGHT (general lit side) • MID-TONE • SHADOW (dark side) • CAST SHADOW (under the apple, on the table) Draw the apple. Use HB pencil for mid-tones. Press hard for shadows. Leave paper white for highlights. Use a finger or tissue to blend.

Lesson 4 — Still life (60 min)

WHAT: A composed group of objects, drawn together. WHY: Combines all skills — observation, contour, value, composition. HOW: Set up a still life — fruit bowl with 3-4 objects. Drape a cloth.



Light from one side. 1. Children spend 5 minutes just LOOKING. 2. Lightly sketch the basic shapes (boxes and ovals where the objects go). 3. Refine the contours. 4. Add value — light to dark. 5. Add cast shadows on the table. DISPLAY: Mount finished drawings on coloured card. They'll be impressive — children rarely realise how much they've improved over four lessons.

