

# River Rocks

## Create a Riverbed of Painted Stones



This lesson plan comes from a series of lessons developed in conjunction with the Moving Waters Workbook. These art-making activities are based on the principles of the Visual Thinking Strategies, a student-centered, discovery-based method that uses art to teach thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy to young people.

Teaching art and environmental awareness through the VTS provides students with open-ended forums for discovery and reflection. The lessons are designed to be experimental and flexible, focusing on the process over the final product. Learn more about the VTS and how you can get involved on our website.

### Goals

To foster creative discovery, and collaborative art-making

### Objectives

To create a collaborative riverbed of painted stones, mimicking the winding patterns of nature's waterways.

### Materials

- Tempera or acrylic paint
- Brushes
- Sponges for wiping stones
- Relatively flat river stones, which can be collected or purchased from most landscape and gardening stores, or from building materials suppliers such as Keller Materials Inc (1920 SE Loop 410, San Antonio TX 78220, telephone 210-648-4221)

## **LESSON DESCRIPTION**

This lesson, which is appropriate for all ages, requires two sessions, each lasting about an hour or more. This is another project that my students really enjoyed. Students loved the chance to paint on the natural rock surfaces, and assembling the final sculpture outside was really fun. Each student painted several rocks, and was inspired to bring in additional rocks from home to paint.

## **LESSON PROCEDURE**

### **Introduction**

Introduce the lesson with images of patterns that exist in nature, both large and small, as well as images of natural running water. This will expose students to an intuitive understanding of the organizing principles inherent to many of the forms and patterns witnessed in the natural world. Ask your students, "What's going on in these pictures?" Allow the discussion to be extremely open-ended, paying special attention to the images that receive the most interest and enthusiasm.

## **MAIN ACTIVITY**

### **Rock Painting**

Let each student pick a few different rocks to work on, this diminishes the pressure of creating one "perfect" painting. Ask students to think about the kinds of patterns that are found in nature, what kinds of patterns could they create? It might be helpful to have some handouts of different kinds of patterns in nature to inspire your students.

### **Riverbed Building**

After all of the stones have dried (this will not take more than an hour), and the site has been chosen for the river rock bed (ideally an outside location is a good choice, but the classroom is okay too), allow students to start laying their rocks into a meandering curve. Allow the shape to grow out of the collective actions of the students. If you choose a site that is obstructed by something, a tree, building, desk etc., the riverbed will be forced to wind around the obstruction, mimicking the flexibility and determination of flowing water.

## **CLOSURE/CONCLUSION**

When the riverbed is completed allow students to take pictures of the project from various angles and distances.

### **Reflection**

Conduct a discussion with students about the process of building the riverbed.

What could be done to extend the project?