



Essential Question for this lesson:

## How did Oscar Howe teach student artists about color?

The Performing Arts Center of Rapid City is home to *The Oscar Howe Project*. This community project displays and preserves two original paintings created by Oscar Howe, the brilliant twentieth-century Oceti Sakowin artist. These two paintings, *Iktomi* and *Heyoka Dancer*, show Howe's masterful use of color; over the course of his long career, he employed increasingly vibrant colors in sophisticated combinations.

Howe's work as a fine artist and as a professor earned him international recognition and respect. He taught at the University of South Dakota for 25 years, where he influenced hundreds of people in positive ways. Some of his students became fine artists themselves; former students remember him with fondness and respect.

*The Oscar Howe Project* exists because Byron Lee gave the two Oscar Howe paintings to the Performing Arts Center of Rapid City. He also gave the project a rare document that allows us to hear the voice of Oscar Howe teaching! Mr. Lee gave us transcripts of Howe teaching his art students about using color and about other topics. Three tape recordings of Howe's lectures were typed out long ago, and these transcripts give us a primary source that shows a master teacher at work. Here is an image from the actual typed transcripts:

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a certain feeling. Here, maybe we'll have to go slowly here so you can  
write down. Beginning with yellow. In all these color charts you should  
remember that beginning with the yellow and that would be on top. That
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Using these transcripts allows us to learn about color theory from a master teacher! We are using excerpts from Lecture 13. In this transcript, Howe is helping students learn how to construct a color chart, or color wheel. Using his instruction, you will show what you think about this text and construct your own color wheel using the last page of this lesson. Headings in **bold** will help you use this text efficiently.

### **Color and emotion**

In Lecture 13, Howe says to his students, "certain colors give a certain feeling." He explains, "These are more or less things that have been brought out in time, research, and so on. That colors have meaning, and should give feeling when we see them..."

"So we have yellow as [happy]; yellow-green as cheerful; green as restful, refreshing; blue-green cool and passive; blue as cold, subduing; red stimulating or irritating; orange stimulating and warm." Howe is giving his students a shortcut for applying this knowledge later, when they will be viewing some famous works of art with



him. He says of these correlations between emotion and color, "It should be accepted, so you can always keep a list handy when you are looking at the pictures later on."<sup>1</sup>

### **Color chart: Primary colors**

Howe expected his students to learn the placement of colors on a color wheel, or color chart, by the end of Lecture 13. He wanted them to memorize the very first set of colors, the primary colors, and where he wanted them placed on the chart. The primary colors are yellow, blue, and red. Howe says, "In making this color chart we show that there are twelve parts....always remembering that yellow is on top, blue is on the right, and red is on the left. If you can memorize those three then you will have a nice beginning in memory where the others will fall into place."<sup>2</sup>

Look at the blank color chart that accompanies this lesson; you will see that we followed Howe's direction and placed a letter Y at the top. Then, we skipped three wedges and placed a letter B where Howe instructs us to locate blue. You can use inferential thinking to determine where the red wedge will be located.

### **Color chart: Secondary colors**

With the primary colors established, Oscar Howe's students were ready to learn about secondary colors. Howe explains, "So you begin with the three colors here and when two primaries are mixed, you get a secondary color. So put that in between the primary colors: you have green,...violet, and orange."<sup>3</sup>

On a color wheel, secondary colors lie exactly midway between the two primary colors from which they are made. For example, violet lies midway between red and blue. When you apply this knowledge to the rest of the color wheel, you will have filled in a total of six colors: the three primary colors and the three secondary colors.

### **Color chart: Intermediate colors**

In Lecture 13, Howe continues on to explain the idea of intermediate colors, of which there are six. He says of these colors, "They are called intermediate; you get these by mixing a secondary with a primary color. There is one right here."<sup>4</sup> He might have been indicating yellow-green, which is made by mixing yellow with green and which lies between those two colors.

Once you have created the intermediate colors, all twelve wedges of the color wheel included in this lesson will be occupied with their correct colors.

### **Color harmony: Single complementary**

Howe explains that two colors that lie opposite each other on the color wheel are complements. He says, "Only these colors can complement each other, these colors can only be at their brightest [when] the two that are

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<sup>1</sup> Howe, Oscar. "Lecture 13." University of South Dakota. Vermillion, SD. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Page 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Page 4.



opposite each other are together. No other two would do that, if they are not...opposite of each other. So that would be the first of the contrasting color harmonies. It would be the single complementary color harmony.”<sup>5</sup>

Look at a color wheel to see all of the sets of complementary colors. Many companies and sports teams use complementary colors in their logos and products, because complementary color harmonies attract people. Pairing yellow with violet, blue with orange, or red-violet with yellow-green creates a single complementary color harmony. Every color has a complement, so there are twelve such pairs on your color chart.

### **Color harmony: Triadic**

Another color harmony that Oscar Howe explains in Lecture 13 is the triadic color harmony. He says, “Now we go to triadic; this means that there are three colors that are equal distance around the wheel. And the three colors that are equidistant around the wheel [could] be the primary colors, or their secondary colors. Now if you want to use intermediate colors you can, but to keep this thing simple,...remember that these colors have an equal distance around the circle. That would be a triadic color harmony.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Color harmony: Analogous**

Howe wanted his students to learn yet another color harmony: “The next color scheme is called analogous; it means ‘related’...we take one color and its related colors that are on either side of it. Like you can take on any three that are alongside of each other. They are always related by color. Now in this case we have these three here and they are all related by what color? Blue, yes.”

Look at a color wheel to infer which three analogous colors Howe was indicating for his students. Art made with an analogous color harmony is often perceived as soothing by viewers. These color harmonies are found everywhere in nature.

### **Conclusion: A master teacher**

We are lucky to have this glimpse into Oscar Howe’s teaching. Lecture 13 shows Howe explaining color theory to students clearly and efficiently. He uses technical terms, defines them, and repeats them. He shows examples and asks questions of his students. He knows that his students can learn the vocabulary of art, and he expects them to succeed with his support. Howe made his community and his state better through his strong teaching and his respect for learners.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Page 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Page 10.



### Thinking About the Project

Please write your thoughts about the questions below. We are looking for your **original thinking**: what actually comes into your mind as you carefully read the questions. Your answers may be clear bullet points or clear, complete sentences.

1. Please name two specific examples from the text which you think show that Oscar Howe was an excellent teacher. Please use quotations from his own speech as your evidence of his teaching skills.

» \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

» \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Please name the six intermediate colors. You may use a color wheel for this.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is a triadic color harmony?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why do you think color has an effect on people's feelings? Please use two specific examples of how color influences your own feelings to support your conclusions.

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\_\_\_\_\_

5. Please explain why you think Oscar Howe's teaching made his community and his state better.

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\_\_\_\_\_



### Notes for Teachers

The lessons connected with *The Oscar Howe Project* at the Performing Arts Center of Rapid City are designed to be used with students in several grade levels. You may need to provide scaffolding in order to help your students access the text. To help with this, we have included this vocabulary bank. This bank can be easily used with the existing word study procedures you use with students.

- brilliant
- *Oceti Sakowin*
- employed
- increasingly
- vibrant
- sophisticated
- combinations
- international recognition
- influenced
- fondness
- rare
- transcripts
- primary source
- master teacher
- color theory
- excerpts
- construct
- efficiently
- passive
- subduing
- correlations
- accepted
- primary colors
- accompanies

- wedges
- inferential thinking
- established
- secondary colors
- violet
- midway
- intermediate colors
- indicating
- occupied
- complementary colors
- triadic color harmony
- equidistant
- color scheme
- analogous
- related
- infer
- glimpse
- technical terms
- defines
- vocabulary
- quotations
- evidence
- specific
- conclusions

### CCSS Language Arts Anchor Standards Addressed:

R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

R10: Read and comprehend complex informational and literary texts independently and proficiently.

W9: Draw evidence from informational and literary texts to support analysis, reflection, & research.

SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly & persuasively.

L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown & multiple-meaning words & phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, & consulting reference materials as appropriate.



L6: Acquire & use accurately a range of general academic & domain-specific words & phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, & listening at the college & career-readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge.

**South Dakota Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings & Standards Addressed:**

EU 5.1: Analyze Oceti Sakowin culture through oral tradition, written accounts, and unbiased information.

EU 7.1: Analyze actions taken by individuals and communities in an effort to bring about positive social change.

Note: Oscar Howe's scholarly work and his stature in the American fine art community underpin his teaching and lend to it the highest credibility. His lecture transcripts are primary source texts and unbiased information.

**More Notes on the Standards and Student Work**

*The South Dakota Department of Education adopted the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards in 2011. The document is available on the South Dakota Department of Education website under "Oceti Sakowin Project." All South Dakota teachers should be employing these standards across all content areas. These standards represent essential learning for all South Dakotans.*

*We have included here the reference numbers and a basic description of each Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding and Standard that this lesson addresses. For full articulations of all of these cultural standards, please consult the official state document: <http://indianeducation.sd.gov/documents/OcetiSakowinEUS.pdf>*

*The text of this article and the accompanying critical thinking questions are considered informational texts. They are real-world texts about a current local project. The questions are designed to elicit high-level thinking and need no answer key. If students are showing their original thinking, engaging with the topic and the ways in which they perceive the project, then they are doing good work.*

*This lesson has been field tested with South Dakota students in grades 6-12 with success. Younger thinkers will need more time and support with the lesson. Below are suggested performance level descriptors that show three levels of performance. Over time, students show growth in inferential thinking and in using textual evidence to support their thinking.*

*We have included Performance Level Descriptors for these two cognitive skills on the next page. They are designed to be used across grade levels. We would rightly expect the thinking of older, more experienced students to be deeper and the examples they give to be more specific.*



**Performance Level Descriptors** (two learning targets from CCSS R1):

**R1: I can make logical inferences from a text.**

3	2	1
Students can combine their own background knowledge with specific text clues in order to make inferences. They can show their thinking in writing.	Students can combine background knowledge with text clues to make inferences, but the inference may be faulty *or* they cannot show how they arrived at their inference in writing.	Students cannot yet combine background knowledge with text clues to make an inference about a text. They may be lacking background knowledge *or* they may not be able to understand the text they are reading.

**R1: I can use evidence to support my conclusions about a text.**

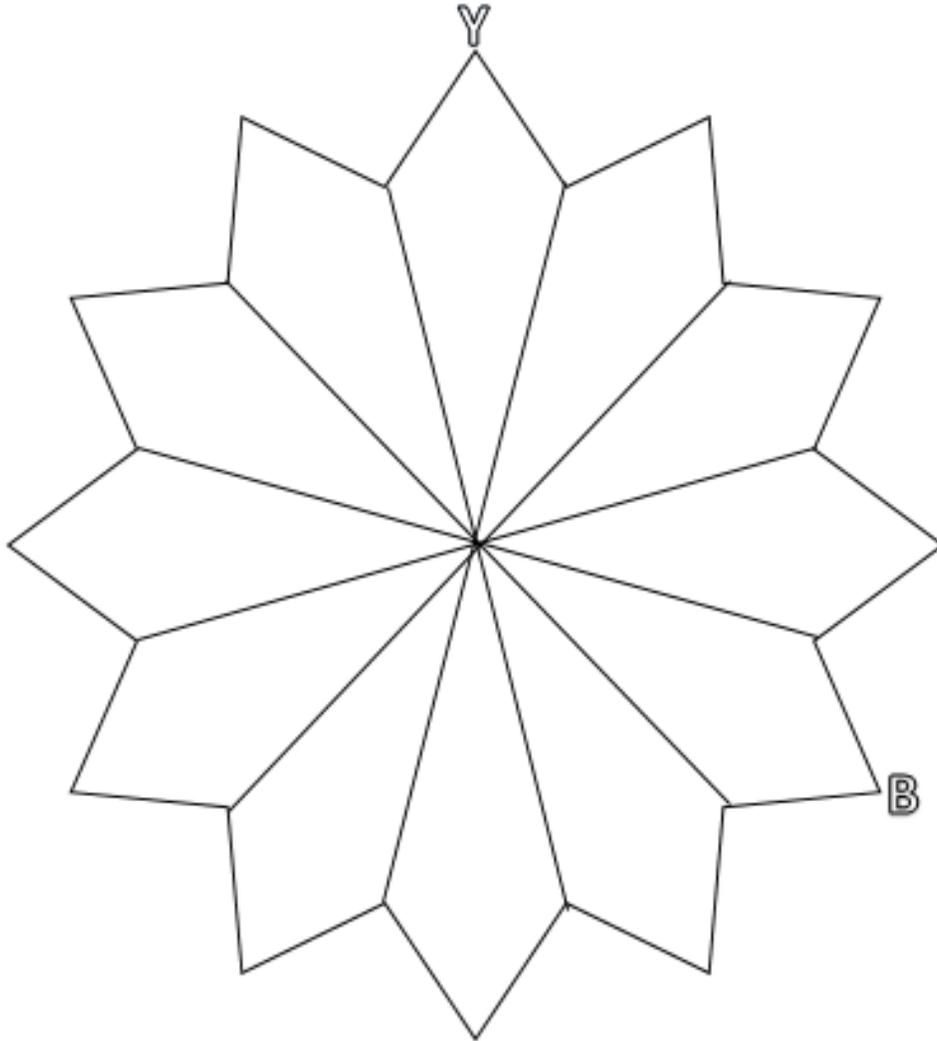
3	2	1
Students can identify 2 specific text clues that support the conclusions they make about a text. They can show in writing how the text clues led them to their conclusion.	Students can identify 1 text clue that supports the conclusions they make about a text, but they cannot show how the text clues led them to their conclusions. They may have formed a conclusion that reveals a misreading of the text.	Students cannot yet identify any text clues that support the conclusions they make about a text. They cannot explain clearly how they arrived at their conclusions. Their conclusions may reveal a misreading of the text.

*Teachers will have success when they encourage their students to show and explain their thinking. Great student discussions can follow! The next page contains a graphic organizer that can help thinkers prepare for their discussions. This process of preparing for & engaging in peer discussions addresses the CCSS Speaking and Listening Standard SL.1!*



**Discussion: How are color wheels constructed?**

Directions: Using the text containing Oscar Howe's instructions, complete this color wheel.  
When you finish, you will be ready to discuss the color harmonies Oscar Howe was teaching about.



Name:

Date of discussion: