



Mistakes are Okay: An Experiment with Color and Lines

By Laurel Payne | Oklahoma City, OK



Summary

1. **Big Idea and/or Question(s):** What happens when you make a mistake? Are you ever afraid of making a mistake? Do you worry about making mistakes when creating art?
2. **Medium(s):** Watercolor pigments, permanent marker, pencil, paper
3. **Grade Levels:** 3rd–5th grade (and up)
4. **Time Breakdown:** Approx. 1.25-hour lesson
(*Video—35 minutes; Activity—30 minutes; Wrap up—10 minutes*)

Materials

- Flowers (or free printed pictures of flowers from the internet, preferably native wildflowers)
- Watercolor paper
- Pencil
- Sharpie/Permanent marker
- Paintbrush
- Watercolors
- Cups for water
- Paper towel or old cloth

Optional Materials: toothbrush, straws, salt, tissues, sand

Video

a. **Introduction:**

My name is Laurel Payne, I am a teacher and an artist in Oklahoma City. Art is a part of what defines me. I have always been an artist because it's who I am. For the last few years, my favorite way to create art is pen drawings with layers of watercolor and ink.

b. **Present a Big Idea and/or ask an Essential Question:**

Do you ever have a difficult time deciding where to begin an art piece? Sometimes it can be scary to try something new or start a project without a big plan for what you will do next.

In this lesson, you will make **observations**, practice different types of lines, and use watercolor to **experiment** with color.

c. **Show an Artwork that Relates to the Idea/Question:**

In the video, I show you my painting from *24 Works on Paper*, plus a few other pieces.

Blank pieces of paper can be intimidating. Sometimes I have so many ideas I can't choose where to start. Staring at a white paper can cause me to hesitate at the beginning. When I was in college and starting to draw on large pieces of paper for the first time, I discovered I had an easier time starting a new drawing if the page already had marks on it. So, I would put a dot or scribble or star on my page to give me a reference point and make my paper a little less 'perfect'. That way if I made a mistake, I wasn't so worried about being exact because it was already flawed.

When you look at these pictures you probably don't consider the fact that many of the details are caused by accidents or unplanned markings. I love mixing planned color layers with uncontrolled paint splatters and blowing paint or ink before it dries. One reason I choose to work with watercolor and ink is that I can add layers and layers of paint to create depth or change mistakes to become some of the most eye-catching or important parts of the painting.

d. **Assign an Activity to Investigate the Idea/Question:**

The activity we are doing today investigates **observations** and **experimentation** with pigment. A *pigment* is any substance that adds color to a material. In art, pigments are often created by mixing powders with liquids.

I love to draw pictures of flowers and leaves, so that is the subject we will be drawing today! I spend a lot of time outside and my favorite places to find flowers are in my flower beds or wildflowers that I see on my travels. An important note—I don't pick the flowers! If I can't sit and draw where they are growing, I take a picture and draw from my photograph.

1. Let's outline our flowers. Don't spend too much time on this step; set a timer for ten minutes. Make sure you use light pencil lines for this and try to draw BIG. If you need to add a little scribble or star so your paper has a mark, this is a great time to do that.
 - a. When I draw, I pay attention to the line I am drawing instead of the whole flower, this helps me not to worry about being perfect. I remind myself that it's okay if my drawing doesn't look exactly like what I am looking at, it makes the drawing more interesting!
 - b. You may have also noticed that I am leaving out a lot of the small details—that's on purpose. It makes it easier to paint and lets our experimentation flow.
2. Once you are finished with the drawing use a sharpie or permanent marker to trace the pencil lines. Try using the tip of the marker and the side of the marker. Make some lines two times thicker and some lines super skinny. What would happen if you skip tracing some parts of the flower? This is the most satisfying step for me. It's like making my own coloring book.
3. Next, we get to add color!
 - a. When using watercolor paint, it is important to have a cup with clean water and a cup for washing out your paintbrush. Rinse your paintbrush before you switch colors.
 - b. If you don't know what to do first, then get your paintbrush wet, choose your favorite color on your paint palette, and make a splash or dot on your paper!
 - c. If you like the color that you laid down, let it dry all the way before painting again in that space. Watercolors will blend if they are still wet and sometimes this can make your painting 'muddy'. When you mix primary colors (yellow, red, blue) you make brown.
 - d. Experiment with different shapes and lines. My favorite shape to paint is a circle. I use dots and circles in my artwork all the time.
4. When you feel like your painting is finished, stop and clean up your workspace. Leave your picture to dry, or place it on a drying rack.

e. **Wrap-Up:**

This is a great time to do a gallery walk. Let everyone walk around and look at each other's art.

Discuss—Was there a time in your art process when you felt like you made a mistake? What did you do when that happened? Did you have a color plan and did your painting go as planned?

What is your favorite part of your painting? What happened when your paint mixed?

I use a mixture of realistic botanic drawings and abstract color applications. Now that you have created your very own masterpiece, what do you think *abstract* means?

Vocabulary:

(Definitions were taken from the [Merriam-Webster online dictionary](#).)

Abstract

: having only intrinsic form with little or no attempt at pictorial representation or narrative content

Pigment

: a substance that imparts black or white or a color to other materials

especially: a powdered substance that is mixed with a liquid in which it is relatively insoluble and used especially to impart color to coating materials (such as paints) or inks, plastics, and rubber

Primary Colors

: any of a set of colors from which all other colors may be derived; Yellow, Blue, Red



Laurel Payne, *Marching through time endlessly waking, reaching, sleeping, dreaming, dying*, 2022. Watercolor, coffee, and tea. 22"x28".