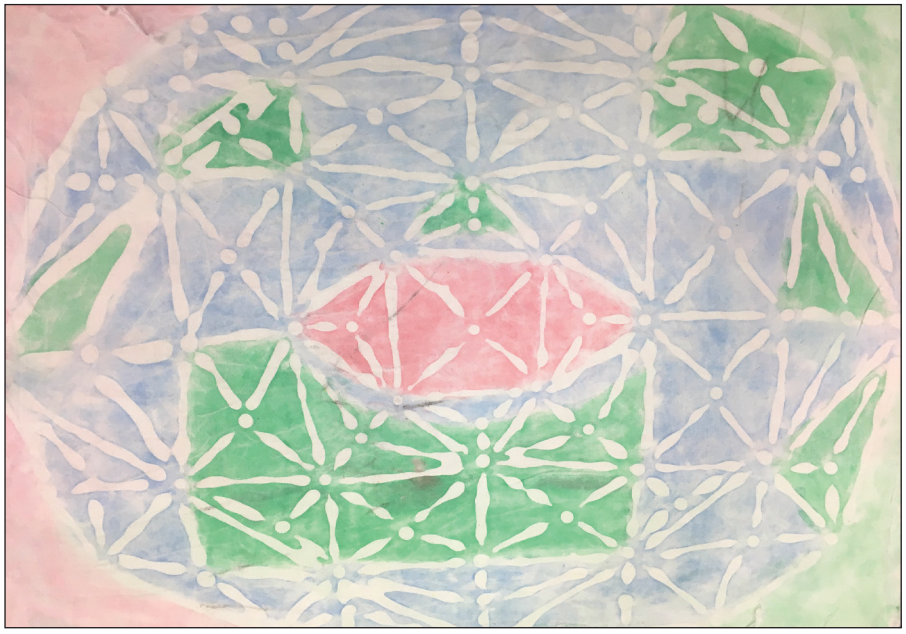
Resist Fabric Dyeing inspired by 'Black Panther'

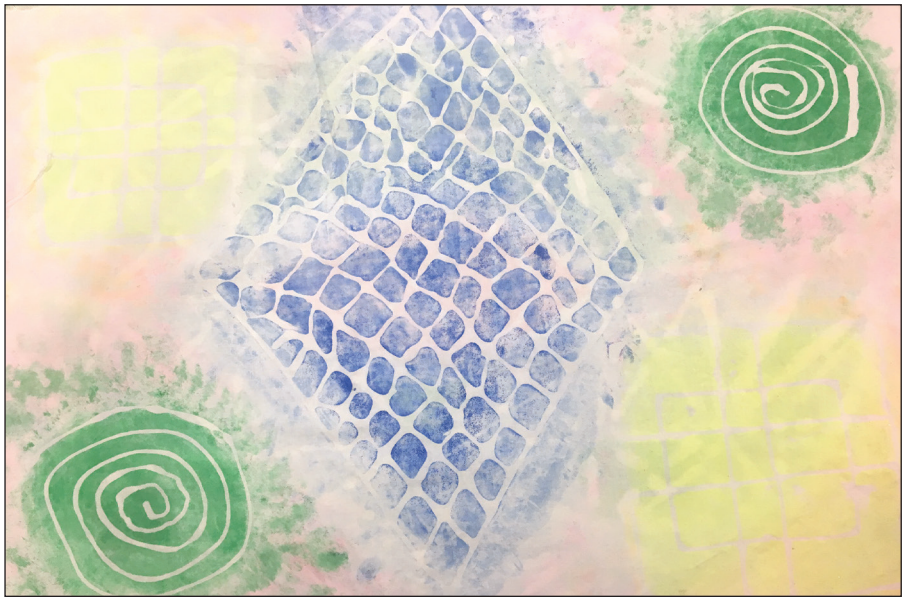
by Pannay Guigley

This lesson began in Wakanda. Yes, the fictional Wakanda from the block-buster film, *Black Panther.* My students were fascinated with the movie, some even seeing it several times in the theater. It was the perfect prompt for us to view and discuss African art.

This lesson was part of a larger unit on African art and culture, and the costumes and set design of *Black Panther*—especially the work of costume designer Ruth E. Carter. We also discussed "Afrofuturism," described as a movement in the arts (film, music, literature, visual art, etc.), that features futuristic or science-fiction themes that incorporate elements of black history and culture. We also listened to music and viewed the work by Afrofuturist artists such as Aaron Douglas, sculptor Cyrus Kabiru, jazz composer Sun Ra, and singer/songwriter Janelle Monáe.

After dividing into small groups, the students created new tribes for Wakanda. They fused their knowledge of African art with what they learned about Afrofuturism to create new ideas and visuals. In the unit, they chose their tribe's color scheme, created a papier-mâché mask for a ceremony, wrote an origin story,





LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Middle school students will ...

- identify patterns in African fabrics and art.
- understand the process of resist.
- understand geometric and organic shapes.

NATIONAL ART STANDARDS

- CREATING: Using new materials, tools and processes to create.
- PRESENTING: Interpreting and discussing artistic work.
- RESPONDING: Understanding and evaluating how art fits into a larger cultural context.
- CONNECTING: Relating art ideas and work with popular culture.

MATERIALS

- White or off-white cotton fabric
- Washable glue (we used Elmer's)
- Fabric paint, shaving cream, brushes
- Access to washing machine and iron

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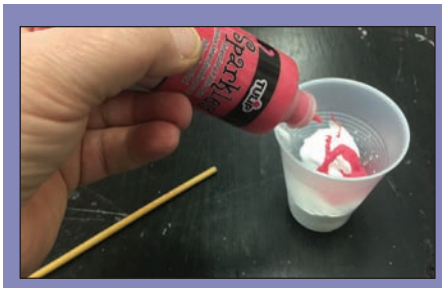
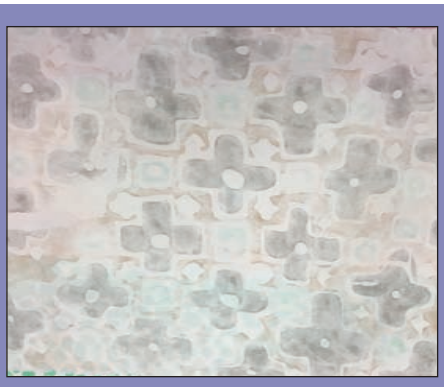
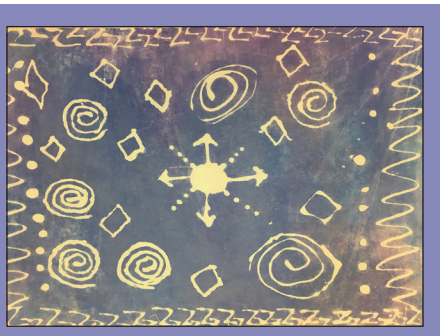


The more fabric paint you add to the shaving cream, the deeper the color. ^

Some chose to use a repeating pattern. >





^ This student used a variety of symbols and patterns.

^ Applying designs with Washable Elmers Glue.

^ Allow paint to set for at least 48 hours.

< Glue design on fabric. Glue needs to dry completely before painting.

designed regalia for ceremonies, and resist-dyed cloth as their tribe's flag.

I had been wanting to do a resist project with my students, and this unit was the perfect fit. I needed it to be very inexpensive, so I had to find items on hand that would work. I was pleased to find a few yards of cotton muslin (donated to my classroom) as well as an adequate amount of Elmer's washable glue in the art room closet.

There was also a basket of partially used fabric paints, as well as shaving cream from a paper marbling project the semester before. The shaving cream would help with this project because it would extend the use of the fabric paint, and make the final fabric softer.

THE FIRST STEP for students was to draw plans in their sketchbooks. This was a group project, so they needed to compromise with each other. Allowing them to pick their own groups helped foster that.

Next, they used washable glue to free-hand the pattern onto their fabric. *Warning:* Do not place newspaper under the fabric, as it will stick as the glue seeps into and through the fabric. If you have plastic table covers, use them to lay them to dry. It took the glue about 24 hours to dry completely.

After the glue dried, they added a good bit of fabric paint into a cup of shaving cream and mixed well. Then they painted the colors onto their cloth.

The paint dried over the weekend, and I washed the projects that Monday (some had to be washed twice to get all the glue off). I also ironed them to smooth out the wrinkles. This project came out so well, several pieces were chosen to be on display at our superintendent's office.

THE STUDENTS LOVED THIS PROJECT. It is easy enough for younger students, but interesting enough for older students, too. My favorite part of this lesson was not just the projects, but the art talk that took place in the classroom. Using *Black Panther* as a springboard really worked well, and made all of our art concepts come to life.

Students enjoyed looking at African art, noticing the differences and similarities between different regions and tribes, and seeing how that influenced the artists we were studying. The youngsters were very thoughtful about their color choices and patterns chosen for use in their flag.

The whole unit was a raging success, and I owe a lot of gratitude to the film, *Black Panther,* for bringing the visual world of Africa to the screen and inviting my students to explore more of the continent. ■

Pannay Guigley teaches art at Horn Lake Middle School in Horn Lake, Mississippi.