

Weather vanes

Title: Weather vanes in the Wind

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Suggested Grade Level(s): P-3

Suggested Length of Class Time: One or two classes

Subject Areas: Social Studies, Science, Visual Arts

Rationale:

Weather vanes are intriguing objects with a long, rich history. They are functional and decorative. They can lead to many interesting discussions on a range of topics.

Weather vanes are often found on tall buildings such as churches and barns so children may not have had a chance to look at them closely and observe how they work, but they provide an ideal way in which young children may begin to explore wind and movement. They can be functional and attractive because of their decorative nature.

The word “vane” is an old English word for “flag” which gives us a clue that the first weather vanes may have been little more than a flag blowing in the wind.

This lesson offers an opportunity for young children to discover how a weather vane works and how it also may be used as an exciting exploration of a creative tradition.

Logistics:

Classroom setup – Class discussion, individual work. If possible, the hands-on component of the lesson should take place at group tables to allow children easy access to reference materials and pictures of weather vanes.

Materials

Fan

Pieces of corrugated cardboard

Wood skewers

Pencils

Tempera paint

Paint Brushes

Craft knife for teacher and adult helpers

Suggested resources/images –

<http://www.denninger.com/HHH%20RoosterCockerelChicken.htm>

Weather vanes

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/whitebeard/3314215351/>

Bluenose II weathervane on top of Halifax's World Trade and Convention Centre

Suggested Outcomes:

Explore language that is used to talk about art

Explore artwork from a variety of cultural/historical contexts

Discover art as a way of expressing ideas and sharing art work

Work individually and with others in art-making

Introduction:

Introduce the lesson by having the children examine an image of a weathervane (or better yet, a real one if available) and theorize about what it is and how it works. Use a simple handmade weathervane (see resources above) to demonstrate how a weathervane works. Ideally, take the children outside to do this. If this is not possible, or there is no discernible wind, use a fan to simulate wind. Note that the arrow of a weathervane points to where the wind is coming from, not where it is going.

Suggestions for Teaching and Learning:

Explore one, or both, of the following themes:

Place informing art

There are many examples of weathervanes with different figures on top. It is easy to see how people may be inspired by what they see around them when they are creating a weathervane. For example, in a port town such as downtown Halifax, you may see weathervanes with ships or other nautical themes whereas in the "country" you may see more agriculturally themed weathervanes. Put an image of a farm, and one of a port town or seaside, on the board and invite children to say which weathervanes belong where. This is not an exact science but allows children to think about how place informs art.

Functional or Decorative?

Vocabulary:

Functional: an object made to be USED.

Decorative: an object made just to be LOOKED AT.

Introduce children to the vocabulary and provide a group of objects to be sorted as a class. After you have sorted several objects, and the children are becoming more comfortable with the concept, introduce some objects that are both functional and decorative (such a coffee or tea mug). Discuss why we have objects that are functional and decorative. Ask the students if they can think of any examples.

Making a Weathervane:

Provide children with pieces of corrugated cardboard. Encourage them to draw an arrow at the bottom of their cardboard with a pencil. This step will help establish the scale of

the weathervane. Be sure to provide lots of visual inspiration and images of weathervanes for the children to study. When the arrows are finished, encourage children to draw something on top of their arrow, such as a rooster, horse, ship, fish or anything they can think of. Circulate around the class and encourage children to add details. Be supportive of both traditional and unusual ideas. Cut out the weathervanes (children will require assistance as a craft knife is the fastest way) and paint. Glue skewers into the bottom of the weathervanes to complete.

Extension of ideas:

Explore Cardinal Direction: North, South, East West by labeling the walls of the classroom. Tell the children the wind is blowing, for example, from the North and have them point their weathervanes in the right direction.

Experiment with other ways of determining the direction of the wind: wet finger, flag, windsock, smoke, and grass thrown in the air.

Explore other forms of “wind art”: windsock, whirligigs, prayer flags, wind chimes, and pinwheels.

Wind log: create a log to document the daily wind conditions and directions as a class.

Suggestions for Assessment:

Children can present their weathervanes to their classmates, or children in other classes, and talk about their design choices. Encourage discussion and comments about the design. In what ways is it like weathervanes looked at by the class? How is it different?