

iExpress

Dancing Silhouettes

Tricia Fuglestad

My elementary school students needed very little introduction to the graphic design project iExpress, which is based on the iconography of iTunes and iPod ads. I intended to use this lesson only with my fifth-grade students, but found that it was so popular (and easy to do) that with a little modification, I could make it a project for my entire elementary school.

Meaningful Poses

After viewing an animated iTunes ad from Apple and a slideshow of many different versions of their silhouetted dancing figures, my students were ready to start practicing their own poses to their own "iWords." I encouraged them to use their body to express their iWord or "iPhrase" in such a way that their silhouette would communicate the meaning. This required some playful group warm-ups where we took turns shouting out random iPhrases as we tried to pick a pose to match.

Photographing Poses

Then came the task of photographing each student without losing control of the rest of the group. This was the hard part. I created a hand-out that helped students visualize their final product and plan their layout. They were asked to pick their iPhrase, color for the background, and sketch their silhouetted pose.

While they were doing this, I photographed students in front of my makeshift blue screen (blue or green roll paper on the wall and floor). The blue screen is meant to blanket the negative space of the photo with one

color. This helps when you want to erase the background of the image in the computer.

If everything went off without a hitch, I could take all the pictures, upload them to the computer, and show them to the class as I labeled each one with the individual's iPhrase and student name, all before the end of class. If plan A didn't work out, I used their hand-outs to find their

iPhrase. This is a good place to stop with younger students. You can take their layout with all their choices and complete their design ideas on the computer for them. However, if you want to give your students the full graphic design experience, be brave and take them to the computer lab. They will love it!

Creating the Silhouette

The second session took my students through the steps of creating their silhouette. I was able to check out our mobile cart of laptops where students could access their photographs from the folder I placed on our school server. We used Fireworks by Macromedia, but Photo

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Technology

shop Elements works, too, since both allow you to work with transparent backgrounds on images.

Students were instructed to erase the blue background with the magic wand tool and delete. We selected the inverse (or subject of the photo) and used "fill selection" with black to make a silhouette. The steps are very simple, but trying to get a whole class of kids to follow along wasn't simple, so I wrote out the instructions and demonstrated with an LCD projector from my computer. I had them work with a partner, going through the steps for one student and then again for the other. They all saved their silhouettes with a new name in one folder on the server.


Putting It All Together

The final session had students work as graphic designers by using text and images to effectively communicate. I prepared a template in Apple's Keynote, but Fireworks or Adobe Photoshop Elements would also have worked since they also allow you to work with layers. My template had three layers ready: one layer with a sample colored background; one with a sample iPhrase in white lettering; and one with a sample silhouette. I had their silhouettes in a folder on the server, so all they had to do was replace the samples with their image, color, and text. Students were able to adjust image size, placements, orientation, and add other silhouetted elements if desired.

Integration

This iExpress project can be integrated into a variety of curricular areas depending on the parameters given for the iPhrase. Teachers could use it as a celebration of self-expression with words such as: iLovesoccer, iShop, iGetsilly, iRock, iDraw, iCreate.

Or, perhaps you are looking for an interesting way to promote Character Education in your school community with iPhrases such as iProtect, iDefend, iHelp, iMtrustworthy, iCare. Or how about using this graphic design project to make posters to help reinforce desirable school behaviors: iWonder, iThink, iDon'tlitter, iMafriend, iInclude, iRespect?

There are so many directions you can go with this, but I advise that you do it soon while your students can still recognize iPod and iTunes ads. Pop culture icons change so quickly. You can see videos of finished artwork on the websites listed below. 

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas.

WEB LINKS

fugleflicks.notlong.com

www.artsonia.com/museum/gallery.asp?exhibit=77873

www.ahsd25.k12.il.us/~TriciaFuglestad/VisualArt/index.html

