



Spirals in Nature

Lesson Plan

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Educator Resources and Lesson Plans

Summer 2015

Spiral Jetty, Robert Smithson



The monumental earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970) was created by artist Robert Smithson and is located off Rozel Point in the north arm of Great Salt Lake. Made of black basalt rocks and earth gathered from the site, *Spiral Jetty* is a 15-foot-wide coil that stretches more than 1,500 feet into the lake. Undoubtedly the most famous large-scale earthwork of the period, it has come to epitomize Land art. Its exceptional art historical importance and its unique beauty have drawn visitors and media attention from throughout Utah and around the world.

Rozel Point attracted Smithson for a number of reasons, including its remote location and the reddish quality of the water in that section of the lake (an effect of bacteria in the water). Using natural materials from the site, Smithson designed *Spiral Jetty* to extend into the lake several inches above the waterline. However, the earthwork is affected by seasonal fluctuations in the lake level, which can alternately submerge the Jetty or leave it completely exposed and covered in salt crystals. The close communion between *Spiral Jetty* and the super-saline Great Salt Lake emphasizes the entropic processes of erosion and physical disorder with which Smithson was continually fascinated.

The Utah Museum of Fine Arts works in collaboration with the Dia Art Foundation and the Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College to preserve, maintain, and advocate for this masterpiece of late twentieth-century art and acclaimed Utah landmark.

Gianfranco Gorgoni (1941-), Italian
Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1970
Gelatin silver print
Gift of John Weber Gallery
UMFA 1996.022.001
Art © Estate of Robert Smithson/Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

Spirals in Art and Nature

Lindsey Heinig

Objectives

Using *Spiral Jetty* as inspiration, students will be able to:

1. identify spirals in artworks and in nature.
2. create a booklet filled with drawings focusing on spirals.
3. look at and discuss *Spiral Jetty* by Robert Smithson with the class.

Intended Audiences/Grade Levels K-2 with variations for 3-5

State Core Links (see State Core Links at the end of this lesson plan)

Materials

1. Image of *Spiral Jetty* by Artist UMFA#
2. Drawing paper
3. Pencil/ other drawing mediums of choice
4. Images of *Spiral Jetty*
5. “Swirl by Swirl: Spirals in Nature” by Joyce Sidman

Duration One 45-minute session. One additional session for variations.

Vocabulary/Key Terms

Spiral A curved line with a center starting point that gets further away from the center as it travels.

Jetty A piece of land that goes out into the water to dock boats or protect land from waves and is usually straight.

Earthworks/Land art Art created outside using natural materials.

Basalt A usually black or grey igneous rock.

Entropy The idea that everything moves towards disorder or destruction.

Coil A rope like form that can turn in on itself.

Activity

Part One: introduction to spirals

- a. As students enter the room, have drawn swirls on the board/doc camera.

- b. Ask students if they know what type of line this is.
- c. Say “We will be learning about spirals in art and nature today. Spirals are special lines that are all around us when we start to look for them. We will be making a book today and drawing lots of spirals!”
- d. Get one piece of paper. Fold in half short side to short side, have it sitting in front of you like a book. (check for understanding)
- e. Get a pencil and at the top of the paper write your name like a tiny mouse walked by and wrote it for you! (demo on doc cam)
- f. Under this, write the word SPIRALS (demo on doc cam)
- g. Give students 1-2 minutes to practice drawing spirals all over the front of their book. After one minute demo how to draw a spiral starting from the center vs. starting from the exterior. Then let them continue practicing using other drawing materials/color choices.
- h. Hands free- eyes on the board- show them *Spiral Jetty*. Contact the Utah Museum of Fine Arts at 801-581-3580 if you are interested in arranging a field trip to *Spiral Jetty*.

Part Two: discussion about *Spiral Jetty*.

- i. Before telling them anything about it, ask the following looking questions:
 - “What do you see when you look at this artwork”? I see a...spiral, rocks, water, the color brown, etc.
 - What do you think this spiral was made of? Answers will vary; explain that *Spiral Jetty* was made with earth and black basalt rocks- science connection bonus if you have an example of basalt. If you do not, it would be a good idea to find a picture of basalt to show younger students and introduce the idea of different types of rocks. This would be a great way to work with the upper grade core teachers when they are talking about rocks with the students.
 1. Upper grades LQ: Where do you think the artist got the rocks from? The rocks came from Rozel Point, which is at Great Salt Lake.
 - What type of lines do you see? Curves, wavy, spiral
 1. Upper grade LQ: What other elements of art do you see? Answers will vary.
 - What would you title this piece? Answers will vary.
- j. Now tell the students more about the piece of art: *Spiral Jetty* was created by a man named Robert Smithson in 1970 using over 6,000 tons of rock and earth. A jetty is a piece of land that goes out into the water but it is usually straight. Jettys are used to either dock boats or to protect land from waves. The spiral is 1,500 feet long (tell them how tall you are) and 15 feet wide. Show picture of someone (preferably Smithson) walking on *Spiral Jetty*.
 - What do you think it would feel like to walk on *Spiral Jetty*? Answers will vary.
 - Why would Smithson choose a spiral? Answers will vary.

- Upper grade continuation: Talk about the site of *Spiral Jetty* itself- the distance from roads, the few people who trek out to the site, the fact that the jetty was underwater until 2002, etc.
 - I. Why would Smithson want to use this site? Answers will vary. He thought it was beautiful and strange with red-violet algae growing in the water. If mature enough to discuss, introduce the word entropy (the idea that everything moves towards disorder/deconstruction) and ask students how that relates to this piece).

Part Three: continuation with spirals.

- k. Have students open their booklets and spend 2-3 minutes drawing *Spiral Jetty* on their page with any medium/colors. Have them label it.
- l. Ask students if they have ever seen spirals occur naturally in the world and if so where? Answers will vary, but this will lead you into reading the book.
- m. Spirals are everywhere in our world, *Spiral Jetty* is an example of a spiral in art! Let's look at some special places we could find spirals in nature. Read "Swirl by Swirl".
- n. Generate a list of the animals that you encountered in the story.
- o. Students will go to the next page in their book, label it "animals" and then draw animals they saw for 3 minutes using any medium. Circulate to check for understanding
- p. Generate a list of the objects you saw in the story.
- q. Students will go to their last page in their book and draw all the objects they can for 3 minutes using any medium. 2nd graders will need to save two fingers worth of space at the top of their page.
- r. Depending on time left, there may be time for a gallery stroll to see everyone's favorite page they created, draw/color for a few more minutes or share what they learned with their neighbors.

Part Four: Wrap up!

- s. Wrap up! With about 5 minutes left of class make sure to talk to the students about what the book *Swirl by Swirl* and *Spiral Jetty* have in common. Have 2nd graders write their answer at the top of the very last page: "Swirl by Swirl and *Spiral Jetty* both _____".
- t. Ask them "What kind of animals would live at *Spiral Jetty*?" "Go to the page where you drew your animals and draw a swirl next to any they think would live there." They can also draw an animal that would live there on their page if there is time (there should be plenty of space).
- u. Ask "What else they might see at *Spiral Jetty*?"
- v. Finally, ask "What do you like about *Spiral Jetty*? Why?" You will get some great answers to that one!

Variations for grades 3-5:

- a. During the next class period show the students *Spiral Jetty* again and ask them what they think it would take to create a large spiral. Take students outside to collect object, make a plan and create a giant spiral. Remind them about/discuss entropy and then watch it work.
- b. Add pages to the booklet and give the students longer drawing periods for their pages. Be more specific about the animals/objects they are drawing and encourage more details.
- c. Add pages to the booklet and discuss other types of lines in nature/art

Methods of Assessment

- a. Collect books and assess for ability to create swirls/draw objects
- b. Call on all students and assess answers to looking questions
- c. Note on task behavior while working in books

State Core Links

Kindergarten—Art

Standard 1: Students will develop a sense of self.

- Objective 2 Develop skills in gross and fine motor movement.
- c. Perform a variety of fine motor skills (e.g. draw, cut, paste, mold, write)
- Objective 3 Develop and use skills to communicate ideas, information, and feelings.
- a. Identify and express ideas, information, and feelings in a variety of ways (e.g., draw, paint, tell stories, play, make believe, sing, dance).

Kindergarten—Speaking and Listening

Standard 1 a: Follow agreed upon rules for discussions.

Standard 6: Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

1st Grade—Art

Standard 1: Students will develop a sense of self.

- Objective 3 Develop and use skills to communicate ideas, information, and feelings.
- b. Express how colors, values, and sizes have been controlled in artworks to create mood, tell stories, or celebrate events.

1st Grade—Speaking and Listening

Standard 1 b: Follow agreed upon rules for discussions.

Standard 4: Describe people, places, things and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

1st Grade—Art

Standard 1: Students will develop a sense of self.

- Objective 3 Develop and use skills to communicate ideas, information, and feelings.
c. Create, with improving accuracy, works of art depicting depth (e.g., close objects large, distant objects small) using secondary and tertiary colors.

2nd Grade—Speaking and Listening

Standard 1: Follow agreed upon rules for discussions.

State Core Links

Kindergarten—Art

Elements of Art: Line.

Identify and use different lines: straight, zigzag, curved, wavy, thick, thin.

Kindergarten—Mathematics: Geometry

Identify top, bottom, middle.

Know and use terms of orientation and relative position, such as: closed, open etc.

1st Grade—Art

Elements of Art: Line.

Identify and use different lines: straight, zigzag, curved, wavy, thick, thin.

Observe how lines are used in Georgia O’Keeffe shell paintings.

1st Grade—Mathematics: Geometry

Identify top, bottom, middle.

Know and use terms of orientation and relative position, such as: closed, open etc.

2nd Grade—Art

Recognize different types of lines: Vertical, horizontal, diagonal

Observe shape, mass and line in sculptures

Recognize and discuss landscapes

Observe and discuss abstract sculptures

Additional Resources

- www.theartstory.org
- www.umfa.utah.edu
- www.diaart.org