Perfectly Proportioned Paper Figure

Recommended for Grades 5-12

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Portray your unique shape and style.

We hear a lot about body positivity these days, but what does it really mean? It means feeling confident and secure in the body you have. It means not comparing yourself to friends, social media, or celebrities. It means expressing your whole self, all the time. Discuss the concept of body positivity as a group. Then, with the goal of celebrating their own unique shapes and styles, students will design movable, posable paper figures in their own image.

Start with figure sketching. Students in academic art ateliers are often taught measurement guidelines for figure proportion. For example, the "rule of heads" explains that the human figure is measured in units equal to the height of the head, with most figures totaling eight heads tall. While these traditional guides are helpful, not everyone's body fits them precisely. Factors like age, body type, and genetics can all create variation.

Using the rule of heads, students will sketch a figure drawing of themselves. Most will notice that the initial sketch doesn't fully reflect their unique proportions. They will then adjust the sketch to more accurately represent their own bodies.

The final sketch becomes a template for creating a personalized paper doll from heavy Arches watercolor paper. Pieces of the body are assembled at the joints using jewelry jump rings, allowing the doll to move. Finally, students create a full line of expressive clothing using decorative papers, fabric scraps, and yarn.

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Required Materials

Arches Watercolor Sheet, Natural White, 22" x 30", cold press, 300 lb (10011-1012); share three sheets across class

John Bead Jump Ring Jewelry Finding Set, 1,000 piece set, assorted finishes (80964-1002); need eight pieces per student

St. Louis Crafts Art Metal Foil Sheets, aluminum, 36 gauge, package of 12, 5" x 5" (60513-1036); one sheet per student

Elmer's Extra Strength Glue Stick, package of 2 (23952-1001); share one glue stick between two students

Talens Angora Opaque Watercolor Paint Pan Sets, inclusive skin tones, set of 24 full pans (00395-1249); share one set between four students

Blick Studio Artists' Colored Pencils, set of 36 assorted colors, (22063-0369); share one set between four students

Optional Materials

Blick Studio Double-Ended Alcohol Art Markers, set of 24 assorted colors, (22148-1039)

Blick Premium Colored Art Paper, package of 50 assorted colors, 9" x 12" (11409-1003)

Roylco Decorative Paper Packs, design paper, classroom pack of 248 patterned sheets, 8-1/2" x 11" (11262-1170)

Smart-Fab Art and Decoration Fabric, package of 45 sheets, assorted colors, 12" x 18" (62130-1006)

Morex Ribbon Sampler Pack, assorted colors and sizes, 40 yds (87782-1040)

SuperMoss Raffia, choice of color and size, (85921-)

Decorative Paper Assortment, 1 lb pack (12440-1001)

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Preparation

1. Cut Arches watercolor paper into 7” x 10” sheets. Need one per student.

Process

1. Create a full figure self-portrait sketch using the rules of proportion for figure drawing. To apply the rule of heads and ensure the entire figure fits on one sheet, use a ruler to make nine horizontal registration marks, spaced 1” apart, down a sheet of 9” x 12” paper.
2. Number each space between the lines. In the top section, draw a head. The second space begins at the neck and extends to about mid-shoulder. The third space ends at the elbow for the arms, which line up around the navel for the trunk of the body. The fourth space ends at the mid-point of the body, around the wrists and bottom of the hips. The fifth and sixth spaces contain the top of the legs and end just below the kneecaps. The seventh and eighth spaces contain the shins and end at the feet. There's no need for detail yet—this sketch will serve as a template for the paper doll.
3. Once this basic figure has been drawn, adjust proportions as needed to better reflect the individual's body type. A full-length mirror can help ensure the sketch is as accurate as possible.
4. To create the templates for the finished figure, cut the sketch at major joints. Sections to be cut include head and torso, upper arm (including elbow), lower arm and hand (including elbow), upper leg (including knee), lower leg and foot (including knee). Do not cut at neck, wrist, or ankle. For the arms and legs, use the right side of the sketch to cut the upper arm and leg with elbow/knee and the left side of the sketch to cut the lower arm and leg with elbow/knee. It is important to keep the elbow/knee in each because these will be overlapped when assembled. The arm and leg templates can be flipped over to make both left and right.
5. Use the segmented sketch as a template to transfer pieces onto Arches watercolor paper. Some segments, like the trunk of the body, will still need to be altered from the template and rounded off where the arm and leg were cut out.
6. Cut out the segments. The paper is exceptionally thick, so it’s best to make a rough cut first, then cut in along the drawn line.
7. Paint the segments with watercolor. Use colored pencils to illustrate features and details.
8. Create hair using yarn or paper.
9. To attach pieces together, first use an awl or a push pin to create holes at joints.
10. Use a pair of pliers to open the jewelry jump rings. Then thread them though the holes, attaching upper arms to shoulders, lower arms to upper arms, upper legs to the hips and lower legs to the upper legs.
11. Use decorative papers, fabric, yarn, and other classroom scraps to create clothing.
12. Create tabs for the clothing by cutting small strips of metal foil, approximately 1/4” wide and 1” long. Attach tabs along the backside of the paper clothing using glue.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

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Step 1: *Sketch a figure in your likeness using the rules of proportion, then transfer onto Arches watercolor paper.*

Step 2: *Use watercolor and colored pencils to color the figure and add facial features.*

Step 3: *Connect body parts with jewelry jump rings.*

Step 4: *Create a variety of expressive clothing and accessories for the paper figure.*