

## Depth Perception



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Want to “go deep” into art?  
Try these 5 techniques for  
increasing the illusion of distance.

Perhaps you've heard someone mention that a piece of art has a lot of "depth". In reference to a two-dimensional piece, this might seem a little confusing. How can a flat painting or drawing have depth?

Depth in two-dimensional art is created by illusion, by altering the viewer's perception, and by manipulating how space appears. It's a little bit of a magic trick that artists can learn to make their work look closer to how it appears in reality.

Using tools of perspective, line, color, and shading along with actual physical dimension, this paper sculpture has the structure of a simple tunnel book. The story it contains is all about depth: how to make objects appear like they are receding in space and offering a visual "push" into the distance. The illusion is exciting and the lessons learned will be a valuable resource for understanding how artists through the centuries have planned and executed the appearance of distance.



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

### Preparation

1. Cut black paper in half vertically to 6" x 18" pieces. Cut colored art papers in half horizontally to 6" x 9" pieces. Each tunnel will need two pieces of cut black paper and 6-8 pieces of colored paper.

### Depth Technique #1: Using Physical Depth

Using this technique, an artist may create actual dimension, raising elements off the surface to create shadows and texture. We can turn flat paper into a 3-dimensional element by folding it.

#### Process:

1. With a ruler, make small marks along the edges of the black paper 1" apart. Mark lightly on the long side, using a pencil.
2. Align ruler against first set of marks and crease paper, making first 1" fold. Repeat, creasing the second set of marks in the opposite direction and continue to crease, accordion-style, until the paper is completely folded. It is helpful to use a folding tool to press lines as firmly as possible.

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### Required Materials

**Blick Premium Colored Art Paper**, 50 sheet assortment, 9" x 12" (11409-1003); share three across class

**Blick Premium Colored Art Paper**, Black, 50 sheet pkg, 12" x 18" (11409-2006); need one sheet per student

**Mapei Sensoft Scissors**, left or right handed, 5" or 6.3" (58468-); need one per student

**Blick Aluminum Ruler**, 18" (55430-1018); need one per student

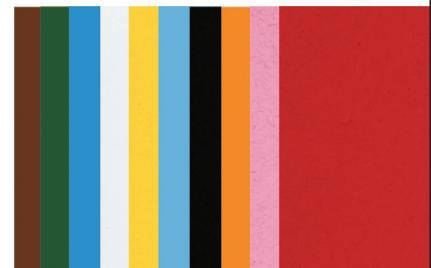
**Dixon Ticonderoga Pencils**, Neon, pkg of 10 (21592-1010)

**Blick Studio Colored Pencils**, Greys, set of 12 (22063-2129)

**Blick Glue Stick**, 0.70 oz (23895-1047)

### Optional Materials

**Helix Angle and Circle Maker** (55990-1001)



## Depth Technique #2 : Overlapping and Layering Elements

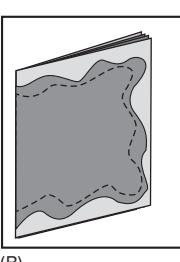
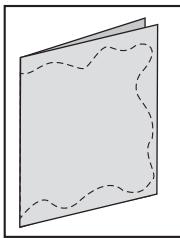
Artists indicate that one object is closer than another by placing it in front in the composition and overlapping objects that are behind it. We will cut openings in our pages, forming layers of frames that will recede from front to back.

- Arrange the colored papers from light to dark. If you are uncertain if one color is darker than another, take a photo and apply and black and white filter. Or, refer to the chart at right.



- Fold the first piece of paper in half horizontally. Start at the fold and use a pencil to mark a line that moves along the contour of the page, ending on the fold near the opposite edge: see (A). It can be a flowing and organic shape, or geometric. It should be as large as possible (close to the paper's edges). Cut along the line, removing a single cut-out piece from the center.
- Fold the next piece of paper in half in the same manner. Insert it inside the first piece so that the folds align. Use paper clips to hold the two pages together. From the fold, cut a line in the second sheet that moves along the contour of the first shape, just slightly inside. The cut out piece will be a little smaller than the first: see (B).

- Remove the first piece of paper and set aside. Fold the third sheet, insert it inside the second sheet, and repeat the cut. Continue the process of folding, inserting, and cutting for seven of the eight sheets. Each frame will become progressively thicker, and each inside cut-out will become progressively smaller. The last sheet will remain solid as a final background page.



**Step 1:** Fold construction paper— accordion style—to form sides. Cut colored art paper in half.

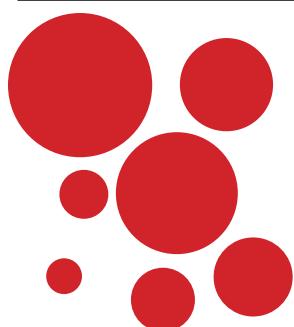


**Step 2:** Cut paper as frames that recede in size. Cut objects from inner pieces. Apply depth-enhancing techniques as listed in lesson plan.



**Step 3:** Assemble by gluing cut frames in the folds of black paper. Position large objects on front frames, and smaller ones in the back.

- Set paper frames and black accordian-folded paper aside while creating elements to place inside the pages. Using the pieces that were cut from the center, choose a subject and make a minimum of eight shapes that progress from large to small. For instance, a circle template could be used to make varying sizes. Or, choose an object such as a fish, a tree, or an airplane. It's best to keep objects fairly simple.



## Depth Technique #3 : Reducing Size

### Reducing Size

We know that things appear smaller as they move further away. Repeating objects that are similar and making them smaller as they become more distant is a technique that artists use to indicate what is close and what is further away.

## Depth Technique #4 : Reducing Details

Photographers adjust their camera's focus so that the subject is sharp and clear in the foreground, and elements in the background are blurry. Not only does this make the subject stand out, it increases the apparent depth of the image. Things that are further away are less in focus, and details are less apparent.

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8. Apply details to the paper frames and the shapes that were cut in step 7 using markers or pencils. Largest shapes and front frames will have the most detail. View example of goldfish and notice how detailed the largest fish is. As the fish become smaller and further away, they have fewer scales and features.

#### Depth Technique #5: Changing Colors and Values

Distance changes the way colors look and also how light or dark they are.

The air around us seems invisible, but it's actually filled with tiny particles of dust and water droplets. Referred to as "atmosphere", these particles affect how we see light, shadows, and color.

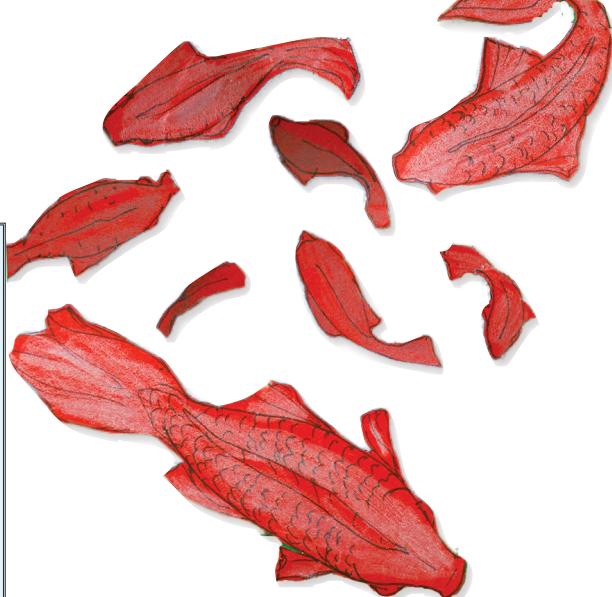
Darker, saturated, and warmer colors appear stronger, so they tend to come forward. Cooler, desaturated, lighter colors recede into the background.

NOTE: When the background is receding into an unlit area (such as a cave, dark forest, or the koi pond for example) the elements will deepen and become less saturated.

9. Adjust colors of frames and subject by using colored pencils to make them darker and lighter. This can be done by cross-hatching or scumbling color broadly over the frames or creating highlights and shading. Frame colors that are repeated can be adjusted to be lighter or darker.

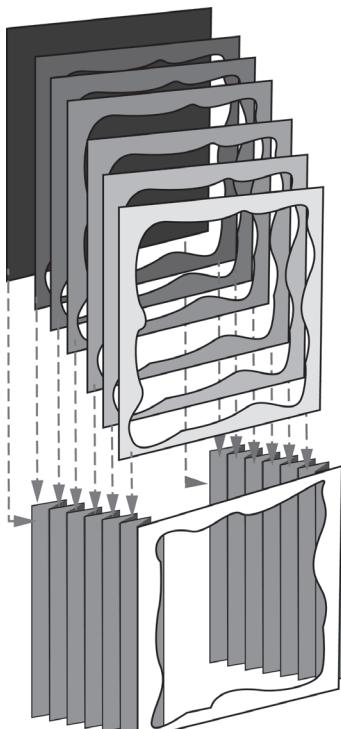
Look closely again at the koi pond example. Notice how the blue and green frames that represent water depths are made lighter and darker by layering colored pencil colors.

Similarly, the fish have received touches of warm, light highlights in the foreground and gray shading on the ones in the background.



10. Once content is ready, glue frames onto black, accordian-folded paper. Start with one piece and glue front frame onto first fold. Apply glue to the back side of each frame, on the short sides, and press them onto the inside folds of the black paper. As frames are added, walls will be formed, and the piece will become a tunnel-like, free-standing structure. Glue solid piece of paper to the very back.

11. Position subject pieces in frames, positioning larger versions in the front frames (the foreground) and repeating smaller versions in the back frames. As an option, the piece may be folded along the center creases as a book. Make sure to position subject pieces away from the center, if this is the planned function, so they won't interfere with the fold.



#### Options

- **Adjust this project for lower grade levels** by skipping Depth Techniques 4 & 5 and steps 8 and 9. After cutting various sizes of shapes for the subject, move directly to the start of the assembly process in step 10.

#### 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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