

# schoolarts

The Green Issue

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# Cushy CANVASES

Emily Moll

I wanted my fifth-grade gifted and talented students to experience the act of painting with acrylic on canvas, and to interpret the artworks of famous artists (an essential part of the curriculum) in a new and innovative way. Inspired by some modestly priced upholstered furniture I came across at a local thrift shop, I decided that students would use furniture as their canvas. The shape and design of the couch reminded us of Claude Monet's *Water Lilies*, and the wingback chair reminded us of Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night*.

## The Couch

I had never attempted this project before but decided that the basic concept of painting on primed fabric might be similar to primed stretched canvas. To save time, I prepared the

couch with two slightly thinned layers of gesso. I waited a full two days between applications to make sure that the inner stuffing was dry. I then

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sat on the couch to see if the primer would crack with movement and weight. When it did not, I decided to give the idea a try.

I asked each student to pick a section of the couch he or she liked. One student chose an arm, another the seat, and another wanted the top.

We discussed foreground, middle ground, and background, and how Monet attempted to create a sense of depth with the size and shape of the imagery.

One very ambitious and excited student lightly sketched an overall outline on the couch with a few simple pencil marks. Students began to paint using both tube and student-grade acrylic paint. I encouraged them to use undiluted paint in thin layers. We discovered that the paint dried quickly and would flex without cracking.

Students observed as each area of the couch started to evolve. The process of painting became more collaborative as they discussed how

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Photography by Blake Hendrickson.





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to make the parts blend seamlessly.

As the project evolved, students became more and more enthusiastic. The 3D flowers on the pillows were created by rolling canvas pieces, then painting, cutting, and gluing them together using tacky glue. Students decided that the finish coat for the couch would be thin layers of interference acrylic to add an unexpected shimmer to the overall piece. The couch was given as a gift to the school counselor so she could offer a special place for visitors to sit in her office.

#### The Chair

The van Gogh painting was originally a \$9 dark blue chair in need of some inspiration and TLC. Students painted ultramarine blue acrylic directly over the dark blue fabric. One student

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lightly sketched out the overall design of *The Starry Night* in white chalk pencil. She then used acrylic in varying textures to create an innovative response to interpreting van Gogh's work. The final embellishment was the addition of glitter fabric puff paint to add a 3D quality to the painted surface. The chair will now be my "art throne" where I will read and share stories with my students. 

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