INSPIRED BY NATURE

Suggested Grade Levels: 3–6
Estimated Time: 1–2 hours

Introduction:
In a prolific career that spanned nearly fifty years, Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933) expanded and elevated decorative arts in America, often through the series of companies and studios that he directed. In the Hanging Head Dragonfly Shade on Mosaic and Turtleback Base (see page 43), created in Tiffany Studios, both the colors and the design were inspired by nature. The base of this lamp incorporates two of Tiffany’s favorite elements: mosaic and turtlebacks, or thick glass ovals, in iridescent red, blue, and green. The glass lampshade is wrapped by a single row of downward-facing dragonflies that sport intricate wings and luminescent eyes made of blue-green glass. Dragonflies were a favorite form of Tiffany and have become a signature motif in Tiffany lamps. The abstract, natural themes seen on this lamp are connected to Art Nouveau and the popularity of Japanese art in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. (See page 40.)

Learning Objectives:
- Observe and describe objects found in nature.
- Explore how artists have used nature for inspiration.
- Design a decorative art object using elements from nature.

Key Terms:
- decorative arts
- Art Nouveau
- iridescent
- mosaic

Instructional Materials:
- images of animals, flowers, insects, leaves, birds, and seashells from magazines, books, and/or Web pages
- found objects from nature (leaves, sticks, rocks, shells, etc.)
- drawing paper
- colored pencils and/or crayons
- construction paper and/or tissue paper
- white glue
- scissors
- paint
- tape or blue
- paper plates
LESSON PLANS

Procedures:
Discussion:
- Have students look at Hanging Head Dragonfly Shade on Mosaic and Turtleback Base using image 14 or the enclosed CD. Ask students the following questions: What is this object? What does it do? What colors do you see? What do you think it is made of? Who would use it? Have you seen anything like this before? What is unusual about this lamp? (colors, use of insect image, colorful base). Explain what decorative art objects are and how artists often create objects with creative, artistic design elements.
- Using the introduction and the information on page 43 provide some background information about the object and its design.

Activity:
- Have students examine images or real samples of insects, flowers, leaves, seashells, etc.
  Ask the students to examine the images and/or objects carefully, noting colors, shapes, and patterns of the objects.
- On their drawing paper, have the students sketch designs inspired by the natural objects.
- Explain to students that they will design their own decorative art object. Tell students they may choose a lampshade, vase, or plate. (To create a vase or a lampshade, have students cut a line from the outside of the plate to the center. Then overlap and tape or glue the cut edges, creating a cone. For a vase, the student should orient the cone with the larger opening up; for a lampshade, the larger opening should be facing down.) Once the students have made their decorative art object, have them use their sketches to design it using any combination of colored pencils, crayons, paint, construction paper, and tissue paper.
- Display the objects around the classroom.

Follow-up:
Have students look for decorative art objects around their home or at school. Ask students choose an object, sketch or draw the object, and write a short descriptive paragraph about it.

Evaluation:
Base students’ evaluation on their observation skills; their abilities to describe the object’s shapes, colors, and textures; and a demonstrated understanding of creative design.

Illinois Learning Standards:
Fine Arts: 25, 27
English Language Arts 3

For more detailed information on the Illinois Learning Standards, see http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/