



Arranged Collections: Combining Art and Science in the Still Life



by Jordan DeWilde, *Art Teacher*

Oregon Elementary School



As an art educator, I love the process of turning initial sparks of an idea into a fully-developed lesson for my students. I start with an artist who inspires me and then I figure out the best way for students to respond and create their own original artwork. I identify what is absolutely essential for my students to learn. Sometimes they will apply an artist's style, subject matter, or a similar process.

Recently, I developed a lesson inspired by fine artist and illustrator, Lisa Congdon, and biologist Ernst Haeckel. I discovered Congdon's work on Instagram, at @lisacongdon. I immediately fell in love with her illustrations, and particularly, her photographs of arrangements. She spent an entire year creating a new arrangement each day, some as photographs, others as illustrations. I thought this could be a really fun activity for my students. Before introducing students to Congdon, I wanted to pair her work with an additional artist to give students another example. I researched online to try to find artists who also created arrangements in their artwork. I eventually discovered biologist, Ernst Haeckel. His illustrations depicted objects from nature, many of which were from sea life. I knew he would be a great artist for the project I was putting together in my head.

Once I had these two artists for inspiration, I needed to further develop my lesson plan. I logged on to the National Core Arts Standards website, www.nationalartsstandards.org, and clicked on the Customize Your Own Handbook option to list the visual arts standards and essential questions for a

sixth grade lesson. I looked for the standard that would be the best fit for my project. I chose, VA:Cr2.1.6: "Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design." My objective was for students to arrange, photograph, and illustrate an arrangement of objects that reflect their personal interests. Students had to try this new process, inspired by Congdon and Haeckel, to create their own artwork.

To further tie in Haeckel's interest in biology, I reached out to the school science department and asked if I could borrow any natural artifacts from their classrooms. Teachers loaned me a great variety of seashells, fossils, geodes and more. Students who didn't bring in their own collection of objects were able to choose from these to complete their project.



Students first arranged the objects in a square or rectangular composition. Once the arrangement was photographed, I asked students to compare and contrast the two artists with a Venn diagram handout. At the beginning of the next class period, students received their printed photographs and started illustrating their arrangement on a new sheet of paper.

The finished illustrations were displayed next to the student's corresponding photograph. This was a great lesson to discuss unity and variety, art and science, illustration and photography. I highly recommend introducing students to contemporary artists from diverse backgrounds whenever possible to add to your existing curriculum!

