**Lesson Plan: A Miniature Game**

*Fox Games*
Sandy Skoglund, United States
1989

**Overview**

This lesson exposes students to artistic forms of representation they might not regularly encounter. Students will inventory and analyze images of Skoglund’s installation *Fox Games* in order to gain an understanding of the complexity with which this artist works. They will then work in groups to construct miniature dioramas of their own Skoglund-inspired installations.

**Age Group**

Secondary (grades 6-12)

**Standards**

**21st Century Learning Skills Addressed:**

* Critical Thinking and Reasoning
* Information Literacy
* Collaboration
* Self-Direction
* Invention

**2009 Colorado Academic Standards Primary Area Addressed:**Visual Arts

* Observe and Learn to Comprehend
* Envision and Critique to Reflect
* Invent and Discover to Create
* Relate and Connect to Transfer

**Length of Lesson**

Two 50-minute lessons

**Rationale**

This lesson focuses on observation and attention to detail, skills that should always be practiced and encouraged. The activities expose students to artistic forms of representation they might not regularly encounter, while encouraging them to work as a team, building cooperation and listening skills.

**Objectives**

*Students will be able to:*

* survey a work of art and list the key components within;
* discuss a statement by the artist in light of viewing her artwork;
* work as a team to create an original work of art; and
* present their unique creations to the class, explaining and describing their artistic choices.

**Materials**

* Computer with Internet access or copies of images from other Skoglund pieces found on the [artist’s website](http://www.sandyskoglund.com/)
* Paper or journals for each student to write down thoughts
* Shoe boxes or cigar boxes—enough for each group of 2–3 students to use for their dioramas
* Clay, Play-Doh, salt dough, or any other medium for sculpting three-dimensional objects
* Paint and paintbrushes, markers, colored pencils, and various other drawing utensils
* Various collage materials (magazines, fabric, wallpaper, etc.)
* Various found objects collected by students and teachers
* Scissors, Exacto knives, glue, staplers, etc.
* Newspapers or other materials to cover work areas
* Containers with water to wash brushes and other tools
* Paper towels or rags to dry off brushes and tools during and after working time
* *About the Art* sheet on *Fox Games* (found at the end of the lesson plan) or student access to this part of Creativity Resource online
* One color copy of the installation for every four students, or the ability to project the image onto a wall or screen

**Lesson**

**Day 1**

1. Show the students images from Sandy Skoglund’s installation *Fox Games*. Have the students write down a list of all the objects that can be seen in this installation. Using the “Things to Look For” section from the *About the Art* sheet, share details the students may not be able to see in the images, such as the actual number of tablecloths, rolls, and foxes.
2. Use the *About the Art* sheet to provide background information about the artist and artwork. Because this installation is so detailed and knowing its context will help students understand the piece, consider giving each student a copy of the *About the Art* sheet.
3. Show the students other Skoglund pieces found on the [artist's website](http://www.sandyskoglund.com/) such as *Radioactive Cats*or *Revenge of the Goldfish.*Allow time for comments and discussion. Raise questions such as:
	* Brainstorm—Why might someone want to create art like this?
	* What effects do Skoglund’s installations have? What effect would they have if they were not installations, but paintings or drawings?
	* What is the significance of color in her work?
	* What is the significance of animals vs. humans?
	* What role does repetition play in her work? How does that change how you view the installations?
	* How does her work make you feel?
4. Explain to the students that with her pieces, Skoglund tries to create the possibility for multiple meanings. Part of the art is the process of allowing viewers to make sense of what they are seeing.
5. Share with the students the following excerpt from the *About the Art* sheet:
	* “In Fox Games, viewers are physically immersed in the work of art as they are able to wander through the installation. ‘I use familiar spaces…and elements like furniture to take viewers out of the museum and place them in…a place that feels familiar to them. Then I interfere with that reality by changing the elements, changing them in terms of materials,’ Skoglund says. Her artworks often take the ordinary and make it into an almost dreamlike fantasy.”
6. Discuss the idea of creating something familiar, but changing, adding, or subtracting different elements to shake it up. What effects does this technique have? What feelings, thoughts, ideas, emotions, or viewpoints does it create?
7. Organize the students into groups of 2–3 and tell them they will be constructing miniature dioramas of their own Skoglund-inspired installation. Have them begin by brainstorming as groups a concept, design, and execution plan for their installation.
8. Write the words “patterns,” “repetition,” “out of context,” and “color” on the board so the students can keep these key concepts in their minds as they work.
9. Allow students to choose the art materials they will need for the project. They will begin creating their diorama in the next lesson.

**Day 2**

1. Allow students time to work on their dioramas.
2. When all of the groups are finished, invite the students to share their dioramas with the entire class. Give them the opportunity to explain the ideas behind their piece, the Skoglund-inspired elements they emulated, elements of their own they incorporated, etc.



**About the Art**

***Fox Games* by Sandy Skoglund, United States, 1989**

**Who Made It?**

Sandy Skoglund attended Smith College in Massachusetts and graduate school at the University of Iowa. She was interested in a variety of artistic disciplines and studied filmmaking, printmaking, and multimedia art. Skoglund moved to New York City in 1972 and developed an interest in photography as a way to document her large-scale pieces. Skoglund’s combination of interests is demonstrated in the hybrid of elements she uses to create her pieces, which are usually elaborate and immersive installations of imaginary, sometimes outlandish scenes. She uses aspects of theater to set the stage and cast of characters, sculpture to create interesting spaces, and paint to add bold color. Skoglund says, “If I had to say anything about my work, I think it would be that it’s almost a theme park. You can experience it in many ways.”

With much of her work, the final product has been a photograph of a meticulously staged installation rather than the actual installation itself. But *Fox Games* is the installation itself. The Denver Art Museum was the first museum to acquire the installation in addition to the photograph of the installation.

**What Inspired It?**

In *Fox Games*,viewers are physically immersed in the work of art as they are able to wander through the installation. “I use familiar spaces… and elements like furniture to take viewers out of the museum and place them in… a place that feels familiar to them. Then I interfere with that reality by changing the elements, changing them in terms of materials,” Skoglund says. Her artworks often take the ordinary and make it into an almost dreamlike fantasy. In this piece Skoglund submerges the viewers in a completely red environment and incorporates animals into what is normally a setting used strictly by humans. According to Skoglund, the foxes are not experiencing this environment in the same way humans would. “The foxes don’t see tables, they don’t see chairs, they don’t know they’re in a restaurant. They just experience different levels of height to jump on.”

Skoglund tries to create multiple meanings for her viewers. This piece could bea statement about how strange the familiar spaces in our lives can be. It might also be a humorous take on our tendency to go through life unaware of the magic in the spaces we move through every day. For Skoglund, it’s all about allowing viewers to participate in the process of making sense out of what they are seeing.

**For more resources related to this artwork, check out the "Find Out More" section for this object on Creativity Resource online.**

**Things to Look For**

***Fox Games* by Sandy Skoglund, United States, 1989**



**Color**

The entire restaurant scene is coated in a flat, red paint, while all of the foxes (with the exception of one red fox) are gray. For some viewers, as their eyes adjust to the all red environment, the gray foxes become a glowing green.



**Details**

Skoglund includes lots of details in the red restaurant scene, which contains about 700 parts. A partial inventory includes 10 tablecloths, 20 chairs, 15 bread baskets, 124 rolls and breadsticks, salt shakers, forks, knives, plastic flowers, vases, a squirrel, 27 gray foxes, and 1 red fox. All the details of a typical restaurant setting are there (along with some clearly unusual ones!)—the only thing that’s missing is humans.



**Several Happenings at Once**

The foxes in this piece have completely taken over the restaurant. Notice a fox in mid-air as it leaps between tables. Others lurk around on the ground or pounce and play together.



**Squirrel**

One of the foxes holds a red squirrel in his mouth.



**Repetition**

There are many repeated figures in this piece: tables, foxes, wine glasses, and chairs, among others. There are even multiple foxes in the same position dispersed throughout the installation.