Unit 03: Shape and Color

Content Area: **Fine Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Marking Period 1**
Length: **5 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

In this unit, students will continue developing their proficiency with Adobe Illustrator by exploring the tools and techniques used to create and manipulate vector shapes for professional graphic design applications. Instruction will focus on shape-building tools, the Pathfinder panel, and color editing techniques that allow designers to construct complex, visually engaging compositions from simple geometric forms. Students will strengthen their understanding of how color choices, including hue, value, and saturation, influence mood, emphasis, hierarchy, and overall visual communication. Through guided demonstrations and hands-on practice, students will learn how to combine, subtract, and manipulate shapes while managing positive and negative space. As a culminating application of these skills, students will create two original design layouts. These projects will challenge students to explore contrast, balance, and unity, giving them a deeper understanding of visual hierarchy and the role color plays in impactful graphic design.

Revised: August 2026

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings

Essential Questions:

- How do designers use shapes to create meaning, organize information, and guide the viewer's attention?
- In what ways can simple shapes be transformed into powerful visual communication tools?
- Why is negative space just as important as the objects and images within a design?
- How can the effective use of negative space improve balance, clarity, and creativity in a composition?
- How do different color schemes influence mood, emotion, and the overall message of a design?
- Why do designers carefully choose colors to connect with specific audiences and communicate ideas effectively?
- How are grayscale, RGB, and CMYK color modes used differently in print and digital media?
- Why is understanding color modes essential for creating professional-quality graphic design work?
- How do designers use color, contrast, and value to create emphasis and visual impact?
- In what ways do digital tools allow designers to experiment with shapes, color, and composition to strengthen their creative work?

Enduring Understandings:

- Designers can use basic shapes and repeated visual forms to create unity and establish strong connections between seemingly unrelated elements within a composition. Thoughtful use of shape helps organize information and creates a cohesive visual experience for the viewer.
- Repetition of similar shapes, patterns, and forms is an effective design strategy for creating consistency, rhythm, and harmony throughout a layout. This repetition strengthens visual identity and helps guide the viewer's eye through the composition in a purposeful way.
- Color plays a significant role in visual communication and carries psychological associations that influence how viewers think, feel, and respond to a design. Understanding the psychology of color allows designers to create work that evokes emotion, reinforces messaging, and connects with specific target audiences.
- Color contrast can be used as a powerful visual communication tool to establish hierarchy, create emphasis, and direct viewer attention within a design. Much like typography, strategic use of color contrast helps designers organize information and highlight the most important elements of a composition.
- Successful designers combine shape, repetition, and color intentionally to create visually engaging work that is balanced, unified, and effective in communicating a message.

Objectives

Students Will Know:

- How to effectively use Adobe Illustrator shape tools and the Pathfinder panel to create, combine, divide, subtract, and manipulate forms in order to develop original and visually engaging graphic designs. Students will explore how complex compositions can be built from simple geometric and organic shapes through the use of professional digital design techniques.
- How to create balanced compositions by thoughtfully organizing positive and negative space within a design. Students will learn how the relationship between occupied space and empty space contributes to clarity, emphasis, visual flow, and overall composition effectiveness.
- How color properties such as hue, value, saturation, and contrast influence visual hierarchy and communication within a design. Students will explore how designers use color combinations strategically to draw attention, organize information, create emphasis, and establish mood.
- The fundamentals of color theory, including the structure of the color wheel and the relationships between primary, secondary, and complementary colors. Students will develop an understanding of how colors interact and how these relationships can be applied to create visually harmonious and impactful designs.
- The purpose and application of the three primary color modes used in graphic design — RGB, CMYK, and Grayscale — and how each is utilized in different forms of digital and print media. Students will learn when and why designers choose specific color modes to ensure accuracy, consistency, and professional-quality production outcomes.

Students Will Be Skilled At:

- Using Adobe Illustrator's shape tools — including the Rectangle, Rounded Rectangle, Polygon, Ellipse, and Star tools — to create precise geometric and organic forms for professional design compositions. Students will learn how to construct shapes using specific dimensions and measurements to ensure accuracy, alignment, and consistency within their layouts.
- Applying the Pathfinder panel in Adobe Illustrator to combine and manipulate shapes in order to create new and original forms. Students will explore functions such as Divide, Exclude, Unite (Add), and Minus Front (Subtract) to develop more complex graphics and strengthen their understanding of vector-based design construction.
- Adjusting, assigning, and coordinating color schemes to enhance visual communication within a composition. Students will apply fills, strokes, and stroke weights to shapes and forms while exploring how color relationships contribute to hierarchy, emphasis, balance, and overall design effectiveness.
- Utilizing online design resources, such as color palette and color theory websites, to research and develop professional color schemes for graphic design projects. Students will learn how designers use color inspiration and industry resources to create visually cohesive and engaging compositions.
- Using Adobe Illustrator's Magic Wand tool to efficiently select and edit multiple objects that share similar color attributes or appearance properties. Students will apply this tool to streamline workflow, maintain consistency, and improve editing efficiency within complex designs.
- Creating and applying gradient fills to typography and vector shapes in order to add depth, dimension, emphasis, and visual interest to a composition. Students will explore how gradients can enhance mood and create more dynamic visual effects within digital artwork.
- Understanding and selecting the appropriate color mode for different forms of media production. Students will examine the differences between RGB, CMYK, and Grayscale color modes and learn when each should be used to ensure accurate color reproduction in digital and print environments. RGB will be explored for screen-based media such as websites, presentations, and social media content; CMYK for professional print production; and Grayscale for black-and-white print applications and media where color reproduction is limited.
- Designing original logos that communicate a clear message, identity, or brand concept through the strategic use of shape, typography, color, and composition. Students will apply both newly acquired Illustrator skills and previously learned design concepts to create logos that demonstrate creativity, visual clarity, and effective communication.

Learning Plan

- Introduce and review the unit's essential questions, encouraging students to make meaningful connections between the guiding concepts and the skills they will develop throughout the unit. Discussions will focus on how shape, color, composition, and digital tools contribute to effective visual communication in graphic design.
- Teacher-led demonstrations on the use of Adobe Illustrator shape tools, including the Rectangle, Rounded Rectangle, Polygon, Ellipse, and Star tools. During instruction, students will complete guided notes and handout activities designed to reinforce technical vocabulary, tool functions, and design concepts. The instructor will model how each tool can be used creatively and professionally within the design process while providing examples from real-world graphic design applications. Students will

then participate in guided exploration activities to practice and experiment with the tools independently within the software environment.

- Teacher-led instruction and demonstrations on the Pathfinder panel and its functions, including Unite, Divide, Exclude, and Minus Front (Subtract). Students will observe how designers combine, manipulate, and transform basic vector shapes into more complex and original forms. As a class, students and instructor will collaboratively create compositions and experiment with shape construction techniques to strengthen understanding of vector-based design principles.
- Collaborative class activities and discussions centered on solving design challenges using Illustrator's shape and Pathfinder tools. Students will apply critical thinking, creativity, and design principles to create visual solutions while discussing composition, balance, hierarchy, and effective communication within their designs.
- Students will create both symmetrical and asymmetrical compositions using vector shapes, color schemes, and Pathfinder functions within an 8.5" x 11" layout format. Through these projects, students will explore the relationship between balance, movement, contrast, and unity while strengthening their understanding of positive and negative space.
- Student designs will include a minimum of ten original shapes as well as the incorporation of each letter of their first name displayed in varying sizes and arrangements. Emphasis will be placed on scale, hierarchy, composition, and the integration of typography and shape to create visually dynamic and unified artwork.
- Throughout the design process, students will engage in brainstorming, experimentation, revision, and reflection to refine their work and strengthen creative decision-making skills. Instruction will emphasize both technical proficiency and artistic expression while encouraging students to develop confidence in using professional digital design software.
- The teacher will provide ongoing individualized instruction, demonstrations, feedback, and technical support to address varying student ability levels and encourage both creative growth and mastery of software tools.
- Student presentations and structured class critiques will provide opportunities for students to discuss their creative choices, evaluate the effectiveness of visual communication within their work, and practice using professional design vocabulary during peer feedback sessions.
- Final projects will be assessed through teacher evaluation and student self-assessment using a rubric aligned with unit objectives, technical skills, creativity, craftsmanship, and application of the principles and elements of design.

Assessment

Formative

Students will be evaluated through daily exit tickets, quizzes on design principles and Adobe Illustrator, and participation in guided discussions. Additionally, they will engage in peer critiques and instructor conferences to refine their logo concepts and demonstrate their overall understanding.

Summative

Design and create two original compositions (monochromatic and grayscale) and an original vector-based logo that demonstrates mastery of shape tools, the Pathfinder panel, and color

theory.

Benchmark Assessments: Midterm Exam/Final Exam

Alternative Assessment

Present the project to peers and/or the community.

Complete writing prompt: Complete a reflective writing prompt: "Explain the rationale behind your shape manipulation, use of negative space, and color scheme choices, and how they help communicate your intended message.

Materials

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    - Online design examples, tutorials, and step-by-step instructional guides demonstrating the use of Adobe Illustrator tools, design techniques, and professional graphic design practices.
    - Teacher-created demonstrations and instructional presentations modeling design concepts, software techniques, creative problem-solving, and project expectations.
    - Former student examples showcasing successful projects, logo designs, layouts, and applications of the elements and principles of design to provide students with reference points and inspiration.
    - Professional graphic design samples from advertisements, logos, branding materials, websites, posters, packaging, and digital media used for analysis and discussion.
    - Printed and digital handouts covering Adobe Illustrator tools, keyboard shortcuts, vocabulary, design terminology, project guidelines, and design process strategies.
    - Class notes and guided lecture materials related to the elements and principles of design, typography, color theory, composition, branding, and visual communication.
    - Instructional reference sheets and design process organizers to support brainstorming, sketching, concept development, and project planning.
    - Assessment rubrics outlining project expectations, grading criteria, technical skills, creativity, craftsmanship, and participation requirements.
    - Critique guides and peer review worksheets to support constructive feedback, reflection, and discussion during the design process.
    - Adobe Illustrator software for creating digital illustrations, logos, compositions, and design projects.
    - Computers or laptops capable of running Adobe Illustrator and supporting digital design work.
    - Digital projector or interactive display for teacher demonstrations, presentations, and group critiques.
    - Sketchbooks, drawing paper, or brainstorming worksheets for thumbnail sketches, concept development, and planning activities.

Standards

ELD standards:https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wdmsiGOdCHlrjU-WPvAtENnEgi0EStZXo0uiFYv1Nu4/edit

1.5.12prof.Cr	Creating
	Creativity and innovative thinking are essential life skills that can be developed. Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative art-making goals.
1.5.12prof.Cr1a	Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.
1.5.12prof.Cr1b	Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art and design.
1.5.12prof.Cr2a	Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan.
1.5.12prof.Cr2c	Collaboratively develop a proposal for an installation, artwork, or space design that transforms the perception and experience of a particular place.
TECH.K-12.1.4	Innovative Designer
	Students use a variety of technologies within a design process to identify and solve problems by creating new, useful or imaginative solutions.
TECH.K-12.1.4.a	know and use a deliberate design process for generating ideas, testing theories, creating innovative artifacts or solving authentic problems.
TECH.K-12.1.4.b	select and use digital tools to plan and manage a design process that considers design constraints and calculated risks.
TECH.K-12.1.4.c	develop, test and refine prototypes as part of a cyclical design process.
1.5.12prof.Pr4a	Analyze, select and curate artifacts and/or artworks for presentation and preservation.
1.5.12prof.Pr5a	Analyze and evaluate the reasons and ways an exhibition is presented.
1.5.12prof.Pr6a	Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural or political beliefs and understandings.
1.5.12prof.Re7a	Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.
1.5.12prof.Re7b	Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual arts.
1.5.12prof.Re8	Interpreting intent and meaning.
1.5.12prof.Re8a	Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.
1.5.12prof.Re9a	Establish relevant criteria in order to evaluate a work of art or collection of works.
1.5.12prof.Cn	Connecting
1.5.12prof.Cn10a	Document the process of developing ideas from early stages to fully elaborated ideas.
1.5.12prof.Cn11a	Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions and history may influence personal responses to art.
1.5.12prof.Cn11b	Describe how knowledge of global issues, including climate change, may influence personal responses to art.
I	Inquire: Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.
I.A.2	Recalling prior and background knowledge as context for new meaning.

I.B.1	Using evidence to investigate questions.
I.B.2	Devising and implementing a plan to fill knowledge gaps.
V	Explore: Discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection.
IV.B	Learners gather information appropriate to the task by:
IV.C	Learners exchange information resources within and beyond their learning community by:
III	Collaborate: Work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals.

Integrated Accommodation and Modifications, Special Education students, English Language Learners, At-Risk Students, Gifted and Talented students, Career Education, and those with 504s

Instructional Accommodations

- Provide step-by-step written and visual instructions for all design projects and software demonstrations.
- Break larger assignments into smaller, manageable tasks with interim deadlines and check-ins.
- Use modeling and teacher demonstrations before independent student work.
- Provide guided notes, vocabulary lists, and graphic organizers for lectures and presentations.
- Offer repeated directions and clarify expectations verbally and visually.
- Pre-teach key vocabulary related to graphic design, Adobe Illustrator tools, and design principles.
- Allow students to access recorded demonstrations or tutorial videos for review at their own pace.
- Provide exemplars and sample projects to reinforce expectations and concepts.
- Use frequent comprehension checks during instruction and demonstrations.
- Provide one-on-one or small-group instructional support when needed.

Assignment and Assessment Modifications

- Allow extended time for quizzes, projects, and class assignments.
- Reduce the number of required design variations or sketches without compromising learning objectives.
- Modify project complexity based on student ability levels while maintaining core standards.
- Allow oral explanations or presentations in place of written reflections when appropriate.
- Provide alternative assessments such as guided critiques, interviews, or portfolio conferences.
- Use simplified rubrics with clearly defined criteria and visual supports.
- Permit revisions and resubmissions after feedback and teacher conferencing.
- Grade based on individual growth, effort, and mastery of essential skills when appropriate.

Technology and Software Supports

- Provide access to assistive technology tools, including text-to-speech and speech-to-text software.
- Allow use of adaptive computer equipment, alternative mice, keyboards, or styluses if needed.
- Create keyboard shortcut reference sheets and simplified tool guides for Adobe Illustrator.
- Provide templates, partially completed files, or scaffolded starter documents.
- Allow students to zoom in on workspaces or use accessibility settings within software programs.
- Offer digital copies of handouts and notes for organization and accessibility.

Classroom Environment Accommodations

- Preferential seating near instruction or teacher demonstrations.
- Provide a distraction-reduced environment for assessments or focused project work.
- Allow movement breaks or flexible seating options as needed.
- Maintain consistent classroom routines and clearly posted daily objectives.
- Use visual schedules and checklists to support organization and task completion.
- Provide additional time for transitions between activities or software tasks.

Organizational and Executive Function Supports

- Assist students with project planning, time management, and organization of digital files.
- Provide project timelines with checkpoints and reminders.
- Use task checklists and progress-monitoring sheets during long-term projects.
- Help students organize digital folders and save work appropriately.
- Encourage use of planners, calendars, or digital reminders for assignment deadlines.

Social-Emotional and Communication Supports

- Encourage participation in peer critiques using structured sentence starters and guided feedback forms.
- Provide positive reinforcement and encouragement throughout the creative process.
- Allow students to demonstrate understanding in multiple ways.
- Support student self-advocacy by encouraging questions and clarification requests.
- Create opportunities for collaborative learning with supportive peer partners or groups.
- Foster a classroom culture that values creativity, effort, revision, and individual growth.

Fine Motor and Processing Accommodations

- Allow additional time for precise digital design work requiring fine motor control.
- Provide alternative methods for sketching or brainstorming, including digital sketch tools.
- Reduce repetitive drawing or tracing requirements if they create unnecessary barriers.
- Allow students to verbally explain concepts before translating ideas into digital formats.

English Language Learner and Reading Supports (when applicable)

- Pair visual examples with written directions.
- Simplify complex reading materials and provide audio or translated supports when available.
- Reinforce concepts through demonstrations and hands-on learning opportunities.
- Provide sentence frames for critiques, reflections, and project discussions.

Collaboration with Support Staff

- Coordinate with special education teachers, case managers, counselors, and related service providers to ensure accommodations are consistently implemented.
- Maintain ongoing communication regarding student progress, challenges, and successful strategies.
- Adjust instructional pacing and supports based on individual student needs and documented accommodations.