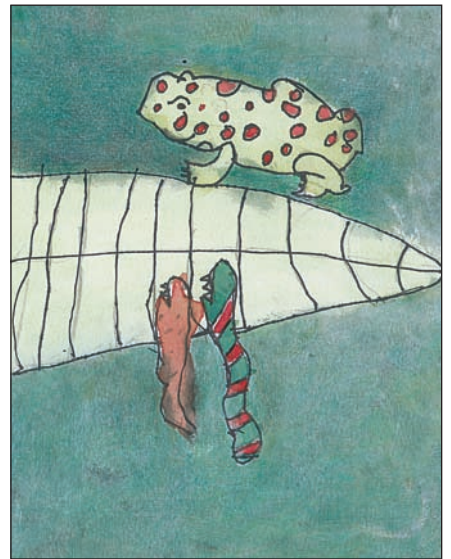




▲ Madeline  
 < Nancy  
 ▼ Celeste



# Fabulous Frogs

by Mark Olson

Any teacher who has tried to instruct elementary-age children in watercolor knows it can be a frustrating ordeal. In my own experience, this was one medium that just didn't work with young children. Students frequently applied the paint in blotches of color or the brush was so wet that the colors ran together. Not only was the painting technique flawed, but the subject matter was often unrecognizable.

In thinking over why teaching watercolor had been such a failure, I realized it had to do with the children's listening or, rather, the lack of it. My conclusion was that a successful lesson in watercolor painting required *active* listeners.

To better engage students in the lesson, I decided to place myself closer to them. The room was arranged for groups of between two and four stu-

dents, with a central area for myself. From this location I could give demonstrations, supervise the painting process, assist individuals needing help, and spot anyone off task. More importantly, my close proximity meant that my directions couldn't be ignored.

To further aid the listening process, I used whole-class instruction. This meant the lesson was divided into a series of steps, and the entire class completed each step before moving on. This method would discourage individuals from overworking an area or going ahead on their own. In my plan, the lesson would cover two days, with two steps done each day. Each step would be completed in 20–30 minutes, and separated by a recess. The recess would provide time for the wet paint to dry, allow the slow workers to

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*Elementary students will ...*

- learn the correct application of watercolor.
- become familiar with color theory and mixing, values and contrast.
- learn about background, foreground and the picture plane.
- complete a realistic painting.

## MATERIALS

- 120- or 140-lb. watercolor paper (we used 5" x 7")
- Watercolor paint sets
- Brushes (#8 and #2)
- Pencils
- Imitation frogs
- Leaves
- Colored pencils
- Ultra-fine permanent markers

finish, and give me another opportunity to check student work.

With a workable plan, I was ready for the appropriate subject. My goal was for the children to paint an object they had drawn from life. This meant the subject matter would require minimal drawing skills and it had to be something appealing to children. While on an errand to a local store, I chanced upon a display of small decorative frogs and realized this was the perfect subject. A frog sitting on a leaf would make a simple composition, be easy for children to draw, and be a subject they would find interesting.

The lesson began with an introduction to the characteristics of watercolor painting. As this could best be seen in actual watercolors, I showed the children examples of student work. In each of these artworks, I emphasized the transparency of the paint.

This also was a good time for a short lesson on using a pencil. Many young children press very hard on the lead when they draw. If they erase to change their drawing, the dark lines will remain and show in the final artwork. In order to avoid this possible outcome, we spent a few minutes making light lines on scratch paper. I then demonstrated how to mix colors, use the brush, and apply the paint quickly.

Finally, it was time to begin the actual artwork. The frogs and leaves were set up and the children began to draw. They were to fill the watercolor paper (5" x 7") with the leaf, followed by the frog. After the colors were mixed, directions given, and much individual assistance, the young artists wet the area to be painted and then applied the color to complete the background. After recess, I showed how to make the leaf color. The children then made their leaf color, pre-moistened the area on their paper, and painted.

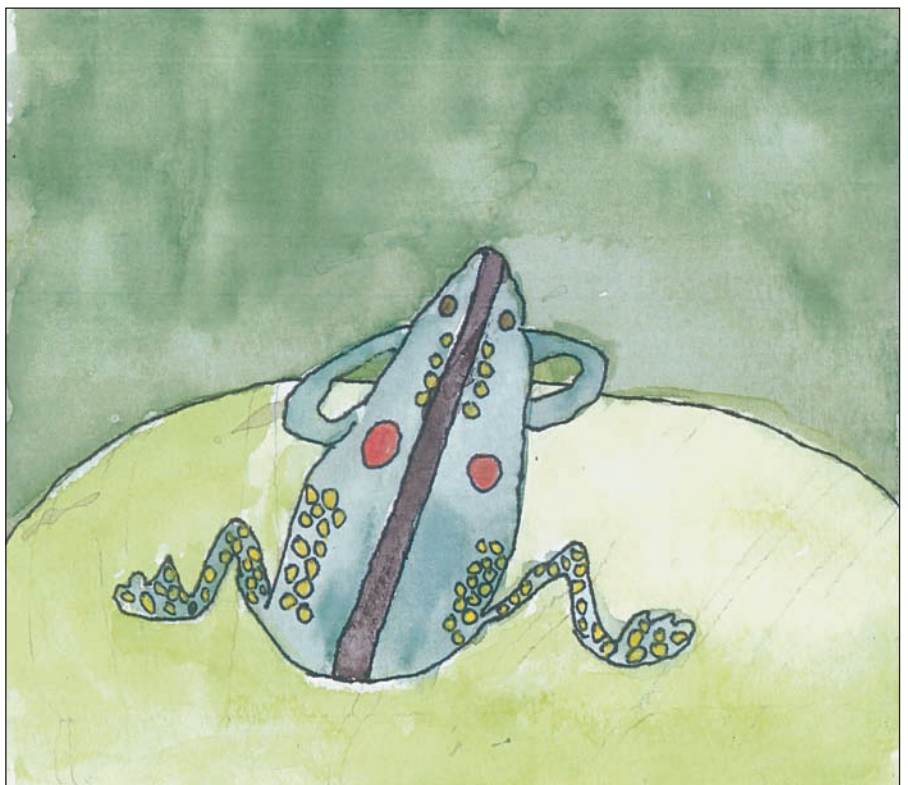
The next day the frog colors were mixed and applied. After recess, the leaf and frog shapes were outlined with an ultra-fine permanent black marker. Adding color for the frog's markings, and any corrections or deepening of colors were done using colored pencils.

In the finished work, the paint appeared translucent and the frog subject was recognizable. Many of the paintings showed considerable skill, along with a unique personal interpretation. These frogs were fabulous! ■

*Mark Olson is a classroom teacher at Donald F. Bradach Elementary School in Adelanto, California, and teaches art part-time at Barstow College.*



**Eduardo**



**Aaron**