Utah Biennial: The Present as Influenced by the Past

Changed by the Elements: A Collaboration between Architecture and Nature
Gianni Pettena’s Tumbleweed Catcher

Summary:
Using Italian Architect Gianni Pettena’s work as a starting point, students will create their own outdoor architectural form/sculpture for their backyard to help them understand the interactions of man-made and natural elements. They will see how the sculpture changes over time based on where they place it and during what season.

Curriculum Ties:
Visual Arts- Foundation 1
Visual Arts- 3-D Design
Visual Arts- Sculpture

Materials:
- Premade wooden pyramids made from colored popsicle sticks or wooden dowels
- Air Dry clay (if students would like to make their own pyramid forms)
- Markers
- Masking tape and multi-purpose glue
- Paint

Resources:
Website: Gianni Pettena
http://www.giannipettena.it/works/

Gianni Pettena (1940- ), an Italian architect and artist, combines architecture and nature to remind us that nature has its own rights (nature will always take it back) even in concentrated urban areas. Pettena’s installation Tumbleweeds Catcher adopted the form of a skyscraper on a vacant lot to demonstrate that nature, in the form of tumbleweeds, was going to intersect its perpetual journey (return it to nature).
In 1972, Pettena constructed his installation Tumbleweeds Catcher on an empty lot, just a few steps from the Capitol, in downtown Salt Lake. The skyscraper, as it was called, was made of pine boards and it was 5m X 5m X 15m tall. Covered with tumbleweeds (a natural component) all over its sides, the installation stayed on the site for one month.

Wikipedia: Gianni Pettena
http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gianni_Pettena&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dgianni%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26hs%3Du6y%26rls%3Do-organization.mozilla:en-US:official
Wikipedia: Green Walls
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_walls

Background For Teachers:
Students should understand the following vocabulary for this activity:

**Shape**- shape pertains to the use of areas in two-dimensional space that can be defined by edges, setting one flat specific space apart from another. Shapes can be geometric (e.g.: square, circle, hexagon, etc.) or organic (such as the shape of a puddle, blob, leaf, boomerang, etc.)
Shapes are defined by other elements of art: Space, Line, Texture, Value, Color, shape, form.

**Color**- Color is the element of art that is produced when light, striking an object, is reflected back to the eye.
There are three (3) properties to color. First is hue, which simply means the name we give to a color (red, yellow, blue, etc.).
The second property is intensity, which refers to the strength and vividness of the color. For example, we may describe the color blue as "royal" (bright, rich, vibrant) or "dull" (grayed).
The third and final property of color is its value, meaning its lightness or darkness. The terms shade and tint are in reference to value changes in colors.

**Pattern**- pattern means the repetition of an element (or elements) in a work. An artist achieves a pattern through the use of colors, lines or shapes.

**Repetition**- repetition is created when objects, shapes, space, light, direction, lines etc. are repeated in artwork.

**Installation Art**- describes an artistic genre of three-dimensional works that are often site-specific and designed to transform the perception of a space. Generally, the term is applied to interior spaces, whereas exterior interventions are often called Land art; however, the boundaries between these terms overlap.
*Land Art*—or *Earth Art* is an art movement in which landscape and the work of art are inextricably linked. It is also an art form that is created in nature, using natural materials such as soil, rock (bed rock, boulders, stones), organic media (logs, branches, leaves), and water with introduced materials such as concrete, metal, asphalt, or mineral pigments. Sculptures are not placed in the landscape; rather, the landscape is the means of their creation.

*Architecture*—the art or science of building; *specifically*: the art or practice of designing and building structures and especially habitable ones

**Intended Learning Outcomes:**
To understand how to use repeating shapes, patterns, and colors to create a sculpture.
To understand the similarities between architecture and sculpture.
Students will learn about how nature can change a work of art and how those changes can inform how we interpret that work of art.

**Instructional Procedures:**
As a class, view the sample of Gianni Pettena’s work (Tumbleweed Catcher) and discuss the image.

Questions to be asked during the discussion will be the following:
What do you see?
What types of shapes do you see?
Are those shapes repeating?
What material is the tower made from?
What kind of plant do you see on the tower?
How do you think the plant got there?
Where do you think the tower was built?
What kinds of buildings do you see near the tower?

After discussing the image, students will build their own sculptures. This project should be based on the idea of combining architectural forms/sculptures and nature. Students will be asked to use the materials provided for this activity (15 premade triangles or have the students make their own) to create the sculpture. If the students will be making their own pyramid, use the attached template to help cut the material to size and to help glue the triangle together that will become the pyramids. Also, use the air dry clay or glue to attach the wooden dowels or popsicle sticks. Once the students are finished, have them either take the sculpture home or find a place at school and install their work. The work should be placed outside in a place the will change over time, not just on a lawn, this way the students will be able to see how the natural elements not only themselves change, but how those changes effect the sculptures.

Questions to be asked during the art making process:

What repeated patterns will you use?
Why are you selecting these patterns?
Can you arrange your pattern with color in mind?
What kind of patterns can be created using different colors?
Does your sculpture grow tall like a skyscraper or does it stay close to the ground like a house?
Where will you put your sculpture, and why?
How do you think the sculpture will change depending where you put it?

Extensions:
Have students take daily photos of the changes the sculpture goes through and use them to create an animation in a video editing program such as iMovie or Movie Maker.

Create a site-specific sculpture by building it for/in a particular place in their back yard.

Build the sculpture around a potted plant that you place on a shelf in the classroom.

Images:
Examples of triangle/pyramid forms: