Lesson Plan: rhythms of light and shadows

About the Art:
Jackie Ferrara’s 107-foot concrete pergola, Covered Walkway, is located on Lehman’s College Walk, a tree-lined corridor, and extends onto the gym plaza. The walkway provides an entry portal from the street through the gym, and onto the campus proper. The design explores the architectural space of a passageway. As it is entered and traversed, Covered Walkway claims “time” as an element. Its rhythmically-spaced slates create fluttering patterns of light and shadow, and frame views of the campus. The walls are punctuated by intervals of penetrated space which increase in frequency as the wall evolves into columns. Overhead the spacing of the bars increases, allowing views of the trees. It is the experience of moving through the space that is central to the artist’s intent “where the viewer becomes part of the piece rather than seeing it as an object”. The site design was developed in close collaboration with the architect Rafael Viñoly.

Activity Objective:
Students will be able to visually create rhythm by the use of irregular patterns. They will create their own collage by combining strips of paper in black and gray on a white background. They will decide how to put together their collages to create a group piece to share with the school community.

Questions for Discussion:
Before the visit, talk about Public Art. Tell them that artists plan how the viewers will react or feel to the artwork before building the work. When visiting the walkway by Jackie Ferrara, have the students walk through it several times, back and forth, looking to the sides and especially to the top of the structure (one side per walk). Ask: While you walk through this artwork, do you see any pattern? Does the pattern remain the same? How does it change? How do you notice that it changes? Why do you think the artist wanted the “windows” to be different sizes? How could you compare these “windows” to a song? Ask the students to walk through it once again, clapping once each time they cross a window overhead. Talk about time (beginning and end), space and rhythm.

Artist:
Jackie Ferrara

Art Work:
Covered Walkway
1993, concrete

Location:
Lehman College, CUNY
250 Bedford Park Boulevard West
Bronx

Grades:
1-3
Materials:
One 9”x12” white or black construction paper per student
9” long strips of black and gray construction paper in different widths
Glue sticks

Procedure:
• Give each student a white or a black construction paper to use as the background.
• Give each student a variety of construction paper strips.
• Demo: Show the students how to “play” with the strips of color to create different kind of rhythms. Tell them that for this project all the strips should be pasted vertical in relation to the background. Let them know they can overlap grays on blacks and blacks on grays. Ask them: If these strips (black and gray) are musical notes, which color is louder? Which strip (thin and wide) will make a longer sound? Where (on the white background) would a pause or silence be?
• Let them experiment with the strips of paper for at least 10 minutes before passing out the glue sticks.
• When finished, tell them that its time to create the group piece (or “song”). It should be on both walls of a hallway.
• Students lay down all the pieces on the floor, one after another, making one or two long strips. Let them talk, critique and change the position of the pieces.
• When finished, tape them to the wall. If it is in a hallway it could be on both side walls at the same height and length.

Closure:
Ask the students to walk back and forth. Ask them to compare their piece with Jackie Ferrara’s Covered Walkway. Make one or two students walk and clap through the artwork following the rhythm of the construction paper strips. Ask them if the public (other students and school personnel) will notice the "rhythm" they have created as a group. Ask them if their work is public art and why.

New York City Strands of Art Education:
1. Arts Making
2. Literacy in the Arts
3. Making Connections
4. Community and Cultural resources
5. Careers and Lifelong Learning

National Art Education Learning Standards:
1. Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes
2. Using knowledge of structures and functions
3. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the works of others
4. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Two works, one on black background and one on white background, showed together