

# Monsters in my Head: Otani Workshop

**Intermediate+ Lesson Plan**  
(Middle School and higher)  
Created by Sofia Trujillo  
École Salish Secondary  
School District #36

## **BIG IDEAS**

Identity is explored, expressed, and impacted through visual arts experiences.

The visual arts use a unique sensory language for creating and communicating.

## **CORE COMPETENCIES**

### **Creative Thinking:**

Students will brainstorm, sketch, and create imaginative monsters using various mediums.

### **Personal & Social Responsibility:**

Students will reflect on their emotions and experiences, and respect others' stories and perspectives.

### **Communication:**

Students will share their ideas and creations with peers, discussing their emotions.

## **MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGIES:**

*Students will use the following materials, tools, equipment:*

- 2D Painting/drawing surface (paper, canvas, board, etc.)
- 2D Mixed media materials (Graphite, Acrylic, pastels, watercolour, collage, acrylic, etc.)
- 3D Mixed media materials (Clay, yarn, sticks, etc.)



Mixed media by Sehaj B., Grade 10, École Salish Secondary

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

This interdisciplinary art project invites students to explore the imaginative and emotional world of “monsters” through both sculpture and painting, inspired by the expressive works of contemporary Japanese artist Otani Workshop. Known for his raw, intuitive style and use of natural materials, Otani’s creatures reflect a blend of whimsy, vulnerability, and introspection. Students will draw from his approach to create their own monsters—visual representations of personal emotions, memories, or dreams.

The project begins with a discussion of Otani’s work, focusing on how he uses texture, form, and colour to convey feeling. Students will

## **CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES:**

### **What students will DO**

*Students will be able to use the following creative process(es) to create and respond to art:*

#### **Explore and Create:**

Experiment with materials and techniques (e.g., clay, natural objects, paint) to develop imaginative and expressive artworks.

#### **Reason and Reflect:**

Analyze how artistic choices convey meaning; reflect on personal emotions and experiences that inform the creative process.

#### **Communicate and Document:**

Use visual elements to express ideas and emotions; document and share the artistic journey through sketches, notes, and presentations.

#### **Connect and Expand:**

Relate personal artwork to broader themes (e.g., identity, mental health); explore how contemporary artists express internal experiences.

## **CONCEPTS AND CONTENT:**

### **What students will KNOW**

*Students will know the following concepts and content:*

- Elements of art & principles of design
- Image development strategies for visual arts and photography
- Creative processes
- Roles of and relationships between artist and audience in a variety of contexts
- Influences of visual culture in social and other media

then brainstorm and sketch their own monster concepts, considering what internal experience they want to express. They will create a painted portrait of their monster, using bold brushstrokes, layered textures, and expressive colour to further explore its personality and emotional depth. In a second phase, using a combination clay, natural materials (such as twigs, stones, or leaves), and found objects, students will sculpt a three-dimensional monster.

This project emphasizes creative risk-taking, emotional literacy, and personal storytelling. It supports students in developing their ability to communicate abstract ideas through visual language, while also building technical skills in both sculpture and painting. Through reflection and peer sharing, students will articulate the meaning behind their monsters and consider how materials and artistic choices shape interpretation.



Mixed media by Ceana Q., Grade 10, École Salish Secondary

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## **PRE-CLASS PREPARATION**

*The teacher will need to make the following preparations prior to the class(es):*

- Create PowerPoint(s)
- Check the links to make sure media materials are available

## **RESOURCES & REFERENCES**

**Behind the scenes:**

- <https://bit.ly/4aymzGN>

**VAG exhibit description:**

- <https://bit.ly/4rihU1o>

**Get to know Otani Workshop:**

- <https://bit.ly/4c2lpnU>

**Otani Workshop products:**

<https://bit.ly/4cAz6L0>

**Acrylic & oil pastel techniques:**

- <https://bit.ly/4tJIVfU>

## **EXTENSIONS**

**Artist Statement Writing:**

- Have students write a formal artist statement explaining the concept, materials, and emotional intent behind their monster.

By the end of the project, students will have created a pair of artworks—a sculpture and a painting—that together form a powerful expression of their inner world. This project fosters empathy, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of how contemporary art can give form to the invisible.

## **ABOUT OTANI WORKSHOP:**

Otani Workshop is the artistic alias of Japanese ceramicist and sculptor Shigeru Otani, known for his raw, expressive, and often whimsical creations. Based in Shigaraki, Japan—a region famous for its traditional ceramics—Otani blends ancient techniques with contemporary sensibilities. His work often features large, childlike figures and monster-like forms that evoke both innocence and emotional depth.

Otani's sculptures and paintings are deeply intuitive, often created without pre-planned sketches. He embraces imperfection, using rough textures, asymmetry, and natural materials like clay, wood, and stone to give his creatures a sense of life and vulnerability. His monsters are not meant to frighten, but to reflect the complexity of human emotion—fear, joy, sadness, and curiosity.

The exhibition *Monsters in My Head* showcases Otani's ability to externalize internal experiences. His work invites viewers to confront their own feelings and memories through playful yet poignant forms. Whether through towering clay figures or expressive painted portraits, Otani's art encourages emotional honesty and imaginative exploration.



Mixed media by Gunoor J., Grade 9, École Salish Secondary

### Gallery Walk & Peer Feedback:

- Hold a classroom exhibition where students present their work and give/receive constructive feedback.

### Digital Art Adaptation:

- Invite students to recreate their monster using digital drawing tools or animation software.

### Character Development:

- Expand the monster into a character with a name, backstory, and personality traits. This can lead into creative writing or drama activities.

### Stop-Motion Animation:

- Use the 3D sculptures in a stop-motion animation project to bring the monsters to life in short films.

## ADAPTATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS:

### Diverse Learning Needs

- *Simplify Instructions:* Break down tasks into smaller, manageable steps with visual aids or checklists.
- *Provide Visual Examples:* Use images of Otani Workshop's art and student samples to support understanding.
- *Offer Templates:* Provide pre-drawn monster outlines for students who struggle with drawing or conceptualizing.
- *Use Alternative Materials:* Allow students to use modeling foam, playdough, or paper mâché if clay is difficult to manipulate.
- *Adjust Timeframes:* Offer extended time for students

## INTRODUCE MONSTERS IN MY HEAD BOOK (OPTIONAL):

The book, *Monsters in My Head*, by Otani Workshop, was created in conjunction with his exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. This publication captures the emotional and material essence of the exhibition, featuring a curated selection of Otani's hand-built ceramic sculptures and expressive paintings.

The book is both a visual and narrative journey into Otani's imaginative world, where whimsical creatures—ranging from sleepy sea monsters to teddy bears and baby-faced caterpillars—serve as metaphors for complex emotions and personal memories. These “monsters” are not meant to frighten but to reflect the vulnerability, wonder, and introspection that define Otani's artistic voice.

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH OTANI WORKSHOP VIDEO:

*Make sure to have subtitles.* Video- <https://bit.ly/4aymzGN>

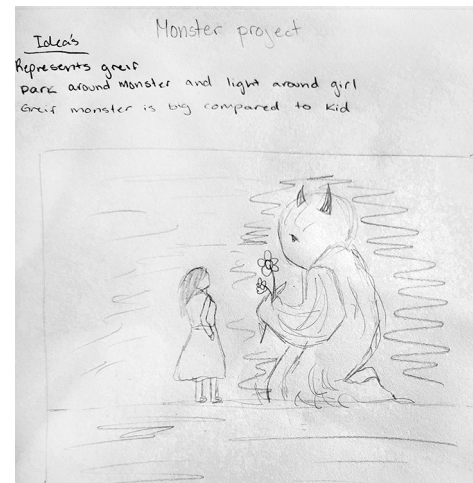
### Questions to think about

- What do you notice about the textures and forms in Otani's work?
- How do his monsters feel—scary, cute, sad, funny?
- Why do you think he uses bold colours and abstract forms?
- What might the “monsters” represent?

## PROCESS:

### STEP 1: SKETCHING THE MONSTER WITHIN

- Students brainstorm and sketch a “monster” that represents a feeling, memory, or dream.
- Think about:
  - What emotion does the monster express?
  - What textures or materials would match that feeling?
  - Is it big and bold, or small and shy? Consider imaginative features, exaggerated expressions, and symbolic elements.



Sketching idea by Kali T., École Salish Secondary

### STEP 2: MIXED MEDIA CREATION

- Give a technique demo of oil pastel resist (drawing with pastel, then painting over with watered-down paint).

who need more processing or motor planning time.

- *Chunk the Project:* Spread the project over multiple days with clear goals for each session.

### Neurodivergent Learners

- *Sensory Considerations:* Offer gloves or tools for students sensitive to textures; allow breaks if needed.
- *Choice-Based Engagement:* Let students choose between sculpture or painting or adapt the monster concept to suit their interests (e.g., fashion, sports, nature).
- *Flexible Seating and Environment:* Provide quiet workspaces or movement breaks to support focus and regulation.

### Language and Communication Support:

- *Sentence Starters:* Provide prompts for reflections (e.g., “My monster shows...” or “I used colour to express...”).
- *Scribing:* Allow students to dictate reflections if writing is a barrier.
- *Visual Vocabulary Cards:* Include images and definitions for terms like “texture,” “resist,” “symbolism,” and “expression.”

- *Oil Pastel Layer:* Students outline their monster and add expressive lines, patterns, and textures using oil pastels.
- *Paint Layer:* Apply acrylic paint over the pastel. Explore resist effects, layering, and blending.
- Switch it around by painting acrylic first and then applying oil pastel on top of the paint. Scratch out pastel to create texture.
- Add background or environment for the monster.



Mixed media by Kali T., École Salish Secondary

I wanted my monster to express grief. I chose to use darker colors for my monster to express the dark feelings that grief brings. That's why I did my monster in grey and surrounded it with black. I chose to draw the little girl in lighter colors to express the light you can still see in people even when they are surrounded by darkness. I did the monster much bigger than the girl to express how overwhelming grief can feel and how small it can make you feel. I did the monster kneeling down and trying to give the little girl flowers to symbolize them trying to make peace with each other and learn to live alongside each other. My artwork did not change from my original plan. I stuck with my first idea because I liked what it symbolizes and what personal emotions it expresses.

I chose to use paint first to paint the background. and then once it dried I used oil pastel to go over it in some parts and add a variety of different shades of blue. and black. I used just oil pastel to do the monster and little girl. I found that the oil pastel blended really nicely on top of the paint and I really liked how it looked. I didn't really face any challenges with this project, I really enjoyed experimenting with new materials. My monster communicates complex emotions and I hope that when people look at my art work they try and think about what it is symbolizing. -Kali T.

## CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

### Language Arts

- *Creative Writing:* Write a short story, poem, or diary entry from the perspective of the monster.
- *Descriptive Language:* Use sensory and emotional vocabulary to describe the monster and its world.

### Social Emotional Learning

- *Emotional Literacy:* discuss how art can help express and process emotions. Use the monsters as metaphors for feelings like anxiety, joy, fear, or resilience.
- *Mindfulness & Self-Awareness:* Reflect on personal experiences and how they influence creative choices.

### Science

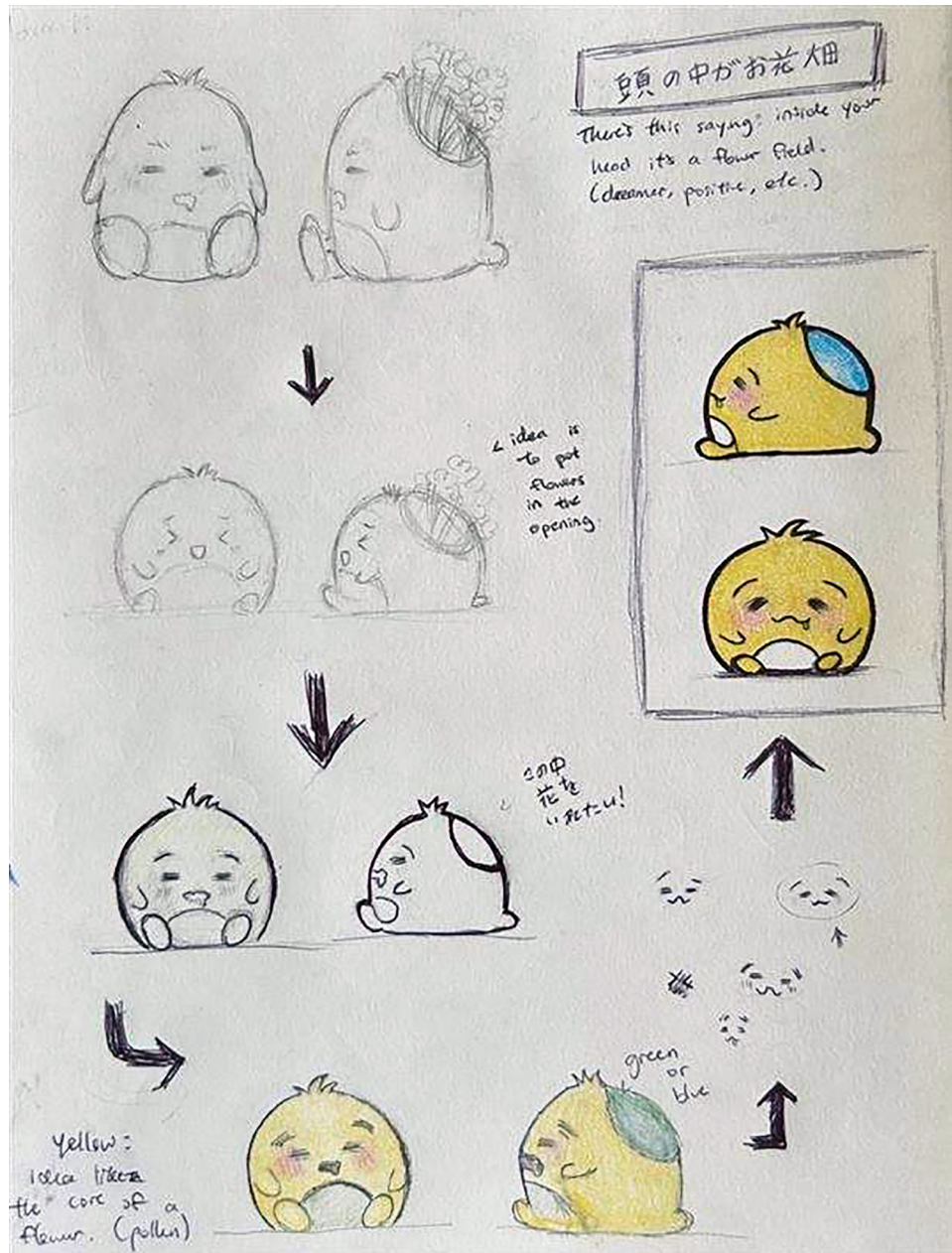
- *Biology & Anatomy:* Explore how body shapes and features can communicate emotion or function. Compare monster anatomy to real animals or humans.
- *Weather & Environment:* Connect to Otani's themes by exploring how weather affects mood and behavior, then incorporate environmental elements into the monster's design.

### Drama

- *Character Roleplay:* Act out scenes or monologues as the monster, exploring voice, movement, and emotion.
- *Costume Design:* Translate the monster into wearable art or masks for performance.

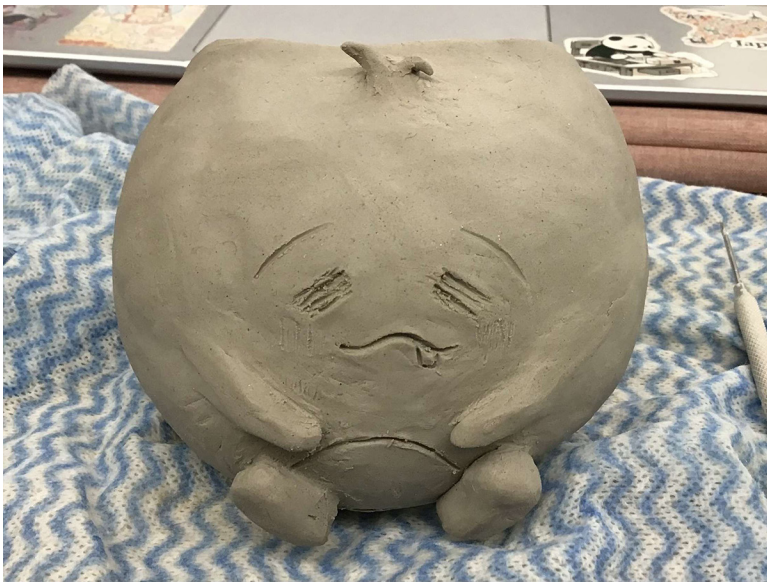
## STEP 3: SCULPTING THE MONSTER

- Build the base form of the monster using clay.
- Add texture and personality using natural and found materials.
- Once fired, paint and decorate the sculpture to bring it to life.
- Display using natural materials, such as twigs, stones, and/or leaves. Optional material like fabric scraps, wire, recycled materials can also be used.



Idea sketches and sculpted monster in progress by Kurumi N., Grade 12, École Salish Secondary





Mixed media and clay monster by Kurumi N., Grade 12, École Salish Secondary

My monster portrays the emotion of happiness. I was inspired by the saying in Japanese saying, "Head like a flower field," meaning positive thinking. Because I wanted to share the emotion of happiness and positive thinking, I thought yellow fits best with the monster I made. I wanted it to be a small and cute monster that looks like a chick or pollen that just dreams about things....

I went over with acrylic paint first and painted the base. Then, after it dried, I went in with the oil pastels to add more color and details to my monster. I found the acrylic paint to work better for me because I found it hard to work with oil pastels. The materials layered over each other and didn't blend, which made it difficult to work with. The most surprising thing was how difficult it was to work with oil pastels; it was different from any other material I had tried before, so it was exciting and new. It was challenging to blend both materials, and correcting mistakes and discoloration was also difficult. I tried to solve these mistakes and problems by going over with paint again and patiently working with my materials for the best results.

Its facial expression communicates a feeling of happiness and peace. Its sleeping face shows a soothing and calm space. I want others to notice the facial expression of my monster and see that monsters are not all negative but can be something different from those stereotypes.

-Kurumi N.

## SELF-REFLECTION

### REASON AND REFLECT

- What emotion or idea did you want your monster to express?
- What choices did you make about colour, texture, or shape to reflect your idea?
- Did your artwork change from your original plan? Why or why not?

### EXPLORE AND CREATE

- What techniques did you try with oil pastel and paint? Which worked best for you?
- How did the materials interact (e.g., resist, blend, layer)? What surprised you?
- What challenges did you face while working with mixed media? How did you solve them?

### COMMUNICATE AND DOCUMENT

- How does your monster communicate feeling or story to the viewer?
- What do you want others to notice or feel when they see your artwork?

## RUBRIC

CRITERIA	EXTENDING	PROFICIENT	DEVELOPING
<b>Creativity &amp; Concept</b>	Artwork shows exceptional originality and a strong emotional or symbolic idea.	Artwork shows clear creativity and a thoughtful emotional or symbolic idea.	Artwork shows some creativity; idea may be unclear or underdeveloped.
<b>Use of Materials</b>	Skillful and intentional use of oil pastel and paint; excellent layering and resist effects.	Effective use of materials; layering and resist techniques are visible.	Basic use of materials; limited exploration of layering or resist effects.
<b>Visual Expression</b>	Strong use of colour, line, and texture to express emotion or personality.	Good use of visual elements to express emotion or character.	Some use of visual elements; expression may be inconsistent or unclear.
<b>Effort &amp; Engagement</b>	Demonstrates outstanding effort, focus, and risk-taking throughout the process.	Demonstrates consistent effort and engagement in the creative process.	Demonstrates some effort; may need reminders to stay focused or take risks.
<b>Reflection and Insights</b>	Deep, thoughtful reflection on process and meaning; clearly communicates ideas.	Clear reflection on process and meaning; communicates ideas effectively.	Basic reflection: ideas may be vague or need further development.