

## 6-1 Aesthetic Elements

Some people have difficulty separating whether a work of art is good or bad from how they feel about it. Liking a work of art does not make it good. Although artistic tastes and preferences are personal, we can use accepted criteria to talk about, analyze, and critique art. The **artistic elements** (listed below) are one accepted criterion. A work of art can be critiqued in terms of how the artist has used one or more of the artistic elements. Activities to help children learn about, appreciate, and use the artistic elements will be provided in this chapter.

What does one look for in an aesthetic experience? How does one analyze or critique a dance, a song, or a work of art? The various expressive arts have their own criteria. In dance, one could match up an individual dancer's movement with the music. Do the movements flow? Evaluating a song on the basis of rhythm, tempo, and one's emotional response is appropriate when listening to music. The visual arts have their own criteria or artistic elements. These include:

- line
- color
- shape
- mass or volume
- design or composition
- pattern
- space
- balance
- texture

Each of these is explained and illustrated with activities. Some are discussed further in Chapter 8, *Sensory Experiences*. Please refer to Appendix C for books on the artistic elements—**line**, **color**, and **shape**, in particular.

### naea 6-1a Line

What is a line? A line:

- is a visible mark made by an artistic tool, such as a crayon, moved across a surface, such as paper.
- is a continuation of a dot.
- usually suggests direction, movement, rhythm, or form.
- does not exist in nature. Nature produces edges. Artists produce lines to represent edges.
- helps the artist define shapes and contours or represent edges.
- is something we use to make letters, words, numbers, symbols, and signs.

Lines can be used in many different ways. Lines have their own dimensions, including size, direction,

length, width, and weight. They also have their own personality. Lines can be:

- long or short (length).
- tall or short (height).
- thick, fat, heavy; or thin, skinny, light (weight). Heavy lines may convey a feeling of force, weight, boldness, or strength. Thin lines may add a delicate, light, or timid touch.
- big or little (size).
- horizontal, vertical, or diagonal (direction). Horizontal lines suggest calm, quiet, and a sleeping, restful position. Vertical lines suggest stability and strength. Think of the lighthouse in the middle of the sea, an upright steel girder, or a rocket blasting off. Diagonal lines suggest tension and activity, as in climbing uphill or skiing downhill.
- forward or backward (direction).
- to the right or the left (direction).
- continuous; or broken, dotted.
- open or closed.
- jagged or smooth.
- patterned or irregular.
- straight or curved, zigzag or wiggly. Curved lines suggest graceful movement, as in a dance or in nature. Zigzag lines suggest energy, as in a bolt of lightning.
- controlled, or uncontrolled and spontaneous.
- dark or light.
- parallel or perpendicular, intersecting or crossed.
- fast or slow.
- plain or fancy.
- sharp or soft.

**DAP** **naeyc** Following are activities to help children learn about lines.

**Kindergarten and School-Age Activity: Line Design.** Children can make abstract line designs using string and a frame. Secure a wooden picture frame. Hammer small nails a few inches apart around the frame. By pulling the string taut from nail to nail, children create line designs. Different colors of yarn add the element of color to the linear design. A cardboard frame can also be used. Cut 1-inch-long slits on all four sides. Encourage children to connect the slits with yarn. The result will be a line design.

**Preschool, Kindergarten, and School-Age Activity: Dancing Lines.** This activity is a variation of drawing to music. Play a short passage of music, and ask the children to respond by making a line with a marker, crayon, or paintbrush. For example, a march could suggest a forceful, patterned up-and-down line. A waterfall could