Review: Before he even begins to cut his tissue papers to make a collage, Eric Carle “thinks with shapes.” His preliminary drawings of the objects, animals, people and places in his books are made by outlining the basic shapes he sees as he looks at that object.

To help students understand the concept of representing things through shape, look at Eric Carle’s *My Very First Book of Shapes* with them. You can present students with a shape and then ask for ideas about what they might create using that shape. After hearing some of their ideas, share what Eric Carle created using that shape.

This book contains both geometric shapes, such as circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles, which have regular defined edges, and organic shapes which are free-form and have less defined or regular edges, like clouds and amoebas. Show students one of each shape and ask them what they notice. After discussing their qualities, similarities, and differences provide students with the correct labels.

Choose another book by Eric Carle and ask your students what shapes they can identify when they look at Eric Carle’s illustrations. What shapes did he use to make Brown Bear or Purple Cat? How about the Grouchy Ladybug?

**Materials:** Scissors, glue, construction paper, photographic image references of animals, a piece of paper folded in half with an outline of a shape on each half, pencils or other fine pointed drawing tools.

**Materials Prep:** Gather or cut construction paper into 3 different geometric shapes; at least 2 of each shape for each student. They can be different sizes, but should be large enough for students to easily manipulate.

**Purpose:** Students will become familiar with the idea of viewing things as a composite of various organic and geometric shapes. When presented with a set of shapes, they’ll use observation, problem solving, and their imagination to construct images using these shapes.

**Warm-up:** Ask students to “think with shape” by using their pencil to turn the shape on their folded paper into something they’ve seen. If they want to draw more shapes, challenge them to use only outlines of shapes. Have your students share what they’ve created.

**Inspiration:** Have students look at a series of images of a particular animal and discuss what they notice about the images.

**Materials Exploration:** Sometimes before starting work with paper in the Art Studio, we have students share ideas about the different ways paper can be manipulated. This discussion gives them permission to fold, tear, crumple, and change the paper in other ways besides cutting as they go about creating their image.
**Activity:** Give each student one set of the 3 different construction paper shapes. They can be any variety of colors. Ask your students to all create an example of the animal (in the Art Studio we made birds) using only those shapes, scissors and glue.

![Image of student art project]

**Reflection:** When creatures are complete, engage your students in a conversation about their process. You might ask them to discuss how they made their creatures, how theirs is similar or different than their classmates’, and what they learned about the materials. You might also have your students display their work before the discussion so that they can have a visual connection to their work as they discuss it.

**Activity:** What more can you make? In the Studio, we often use this question to stretch students’ thinking and invite them to explore a set of materials in a new way. Have your students look again at the work they’ve created in the first materials exploration. Offer the same set of shapes as in Procedure 1 to each student, only this time, invite them to create whatever they want. When they’re done, facilitate another discussion about the process. This time, you might also ask them where their ideas came from or what they learned about using paper and shape to execute their ideas.

**Related Resources:**
* **Ed Emberly’s Jumbo Book of Drawing Activities** by Ed Emberly


* **Color Zoo and Color Farm** by Lois Ehlert