Charcoal Silhouette and Value Contrast for Scary Scenes

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

Plan a scary scene on a hypothetical 15 cm by 20 cm sheet. You will use one large dark shape (a tree) and one small dark shape (a figure). State the value threshold for the silhouette areas and the approximate dark-to-light ratio. Describe where each shape sits on the sheet.

Answer: Measure the sheet as 15 cm by 20 cm. Make a value scale and set the silhouette threshold at patch 3 or darker. Place the tree off-center, covering about one third of the sheet, and the figure small near the lower edge. The dark shapes cover roughly half the sheet, giving a dark-to-light ratio of about one to one. The light area is the sky and ground around the shapes.

Reason: The plan uses simple solid shapes and a stated threshold so the silhouette will read clearly. Off-center placement and a small figure create unease. The ratio is estimated from the described areas.

Check: Squint at your sketch. Confirm the tree and figure still read as dark masses. Compare the silhouette areas to patch 3 or darker on your value scale, and check that the estimated dark area is about half the sheet.

Task 2

You have a drawing where the silhouette shape is patch 2 on your value scale and the background is patch 1. The scene does not feel scary. Describe two specific changes you could make using charcoal and eraser, and state how you would check the result.

Answer: First, darken the silhouette shape to patch 3 or 4 by adding more charcoal. Second, enlarge the dark shape slightly or reduce the light background area so the dark mass dominates. Check by squinting and by comparing the silhouette to patch 3 or 4 on the value scale.

Reason: The original contrast is too weak because patch 2 is close to patch 1. Increasing the darkness of the silhouette and the proportion of dark area strengthens the contrast.

Check: After the changes, squint at the drawing. The silhouette should read as a solid dark shape. Compare the silhouette area to patch 3 or 4 and confirm the dark area is larger than before.

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Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

On a hypothetical 18 cm by 24 cm sheet, you want a dark-to-light ratio of two parts dark to one part light. The dark shapes are a doorway and a hanging shape. Estimate the area of each dark shape in square centimeters and state whether your plan meets the ratio.

Answer: The sheet area is 18 cm times 24 cm, which equals 432 square centimeters. A two-to-one ratio means dark areas should total about 288 square centimeters and light areas about 144 square centimeters. Plan the doorway at about 200 square centimeters and the hanging shape at about 88 square centimeters, totaling 288 square centimeters. The plan meets the ratio.

Reason: The total area is calculated from the measured dimensions. The ratio is applied by dividing the total into three parts and assigning two parts to dark areas. The individual shape estimates sum to the dark total.

Check: Multiply the length and width to confirm 432 square centimeters. Add the two dark shape estimates and confirm they equal about 288 square centimeters. Check that the remaining light area is about 144 square centimeters.

Task 4

Describe how to use a kneaded eraser to add a small highlight inside a near-black silhouette shape without breaking the silhouette. State the size limit for the highlight and how you would check that the silhouette still reads.

Answer: Press the kneaded eraser into the dark shape to lift a small amount of charcoal, creating a highlight no larger than one tenth of the silhouette shape's area. Keep the highlight near an edge or inside the shape, not across the whole shape. Check by squinting: the shape should still read as one dark mass with a small light detail.

Reason: A small highlight adds interest without destroying the solid dark area. Limiting the size to one tenth keeps the dark mass dominant. Squinting tests whether the silhouette still reads.

Check: Estimate the highlight area as no more than one tenth of the silhouette area. Squint at the drawing and confirm the silhouette still reads as a single dark shape. Compare the dark area to patch 3 or 4 on your value scale.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] The drawing uses a stated value scale with at least four patches, and the silhouette areas match the chosen dark threshold.
- [ ] At least two solid silhouette shapes are present and read clearly when squinting.
- [ ] The dark-to-light area ratio is stated and roughly matches the drawing.
- [ ] Edges of silhouette shapes are crisp where the shape matters, and any interior highlights are small.
- [ ] The scene communicates a scary mood through dark-light balance rather than through detailed line work.

Reflection: What did you check, what did you change, and what will you try next?