

FireAlpaca

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FireAlpaca is a 100% free digital art program provided and sponsored by a variety of Japanese based illustration companies. It is available for Windows and Mac systems and is translated into ten languages, including English. It can be downloaded on the official website: <http://firealpaca.com/en>.

The purpose of FireAlpaca is to create illustrations and simple GIF animations of varying complexity. FireAlpaca is best used with a drawing tablet sold from companies like Wacom, Monoprice, or Huion.

 I have been aware of this program for a few years now. My first encounter with FireAlpaca was when an acquaintance linked it in a social media post to spread the news around of a free digital art software. For years, I have only been familiar with software that required some form of payment such as Photoshop (the industry standard along with other Adobe products), Corel Painter, and Paint Tool Sai (a very popular software among digital artists, amateur and professionals alike). Freeware art programs that were of a decent quality were very few and far in between. During the last decade though, there have been a number of programs that have been released to compete with Photoshop and appeal to hobbyists or aspiring artists who want to experiment with the digital medium without having to pay a huge price. MyPaint, Gimp, and Krita are one of the few examples of such programs. Unlike those programs though, I personally feel that FireAlpaca has the most approachable user interface and is the more beginner friendly of all of those free software.

I am an already seasoned digital artist so I did not take a long time to adjust to FireAlpaca. Finding and utilizing basic tools such as the Pen and Eraser was not difficult. For someone who was new to digital painting, they would be able to find a variety of tutorials and resources on FireAlpaca through a simple Google search. The most effective guides are on YouTube and Tumblr, specifically, these links:

* **FireAlpaca Basics** by **LeslieLuMarie:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F632SztGENc>
* **Everything FireAlpaca:** <http://everythingfirealpaca.tumblr.com/>

I think in approximately a week, a beginner could learn the main functions and shortcuts of the program and adjust the latter to their liking.

 In the classroom (middle or high school), this program would be good to use because it comes at zero cost and would be a good introduction to teaching basics of a digital software since most software share a lot of similar functions to Photoshop, such as the use of layers, moving around said layers, drawing and painting tools, and opening multiple files in the programs that can be kept track through tabs. The cons of FireAlpaca is in its limited features when compared to Photoshop which is extremely powerful in terms of color balance, level adjustments, and more editing tools in general. And although the software itself is completely free, to use it effectively, you would need, as mentioned above, a drawing tablet which can run anywhere from $80 - $400 depending on the brand and size (and this is not including tablets where you can draw on the surface such as Wacom Cintiqs which run from $400 - $1000). For the purpose of the presented lesson plan, a mouse can be used for FireAlpaca, but as a future educator, I would have to figure out where and/or how I can fundraise for drawing tablets to use in the classroom. The biggest advantage of using this software is that it does not create a mess like traditional media does. A potential problem is figuring out a simple, but effective system for students to turn in their work. The educator has to be clear and concise about how they want students to save their files and what a completed project in FireAlpaca should be if they were to use it.

 FireAlpaca, is a good introduction for middle and high school students to the world of digital art, showing them that “traditional” methods of learning art and the creative process still applies to making work on computers. Digital art is not a shortcut, it is another medium with potential to maximize your creativity in a different way.