

Abstraction

How do artists communicate with the elements of art?

How do writers use the writing traits in creative writing?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore abstraction to see how artists communicate ideas and emotions solely through their use of color, line, shape, pattern, and texture. Students will discover that the subject of some abstract art is the arrangement of color, line, shape, and other elements of art, rather than the description of people, ideas, things, or places. Students will create a flag book in this session.

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two or three 45-minute periods

KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT VISUAL ARTS AND WRITING

Visual Arts

- Art is composed of the elements of art (color, line, shape, value, texture, and pattern).
- Artists use the elements of art to express ideas and emotions and to describe people and places.
- Abstract art can be based on an artist's interpretation of objects in the natural world, but is not a visually realistic description of the objects.

Writing

- Written work is composed using the traits of writing (idea, voice, word choice, organization, sentence fluency, and conventions).
- Writers use the traits of writing to express ideas and emotions and to describe people and places.
- Creative writing can be based on interpretation of events, but is not necessarily a realistic view.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Students will:

Visual Arts

- Understand that the elements of art are the building blocks for creating works of art
- Recognize qualities of abstract art: simplified or distorted forms, exaggerated colors, distorted or flattened space
- Understand that abstract art can express ideas and emotions
- Create an abstract work of art that expresses an idea or emotion

Writing (optional activities)

- Understand that the traits of writing are the building blocks for creating a literary piece
- Recognize qualities of creative writing, such as exaggeration, metaphors, diminution, etc.
- Understand that creative writing can elicit ideas and emotions
- Use metaphor and exaggeration in a creative writing piece



FOR THE TEACHER**Looking and Seeing**

- Alma Woodsey Thomas does not use overlapping in her painting; this emphasizes the flat surface and does not create a sense of depth.
- Thomas uses the repetition of shapes and colors to show movement. The repetition of the same colored shapes in rows creates lines that seem to travel down or up.
- Have students look again at *Love's Young Dream* and *Staffelsee in Autumn*. Have them compare the two pictures—is one more abstract than the other? In what ways?

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Read about [Alma Woodsey Thomas](#) on the ABC website.

SUPPLIES

- Student journals
- 8½" x 11" colored copy paper, three sheets per student
- Glue sticks

VOCABULARY

The **elements of art** are **color, line, shape, value, texture,** and **pattern**. Artists use these tools to create all visual art—representational, abstract, and nonrepresentational.

Abstract art is based on the natural world, but the forms may be simplified, exaggerated, or distorted; the colors might be altered; and the space might be flattened or distorted.

Nonobjective or **nonrepresentational** art is not based on the natural world and does not contain objects that are recognizable. The subjects of nonrepresentational art may be color, emotions, or the composition of the work itself. Often the term *abstract* is used for both *abstract* and *nonrepresentational* art.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN: OBSERVE, CREATE, AND REFLECT**Observe: Quick Write**

Before beginning the lesson, show Thomas's [Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses](#) to students. Give students a few minutes to respond to the image. Use any of the following prompts:

- How do you think the artist made this artwork?
- This picture makes me think about/wonder _____.
- If this picture could talk it would say _____.
- I would describe the mood of this picture as _____.

Introduction

Tell your students the meaning of abstract and nonrepresentational art. The concept of abstraction may be new to your students; rely on the knowledge they have gained in the previous lessons about the elements of art to help you teach this lesson. Tell them that abstract and nonrepresentational art can convey ideas and make us feel a certain way. Artists do this through their use of color, shape, line, value, texture, and pattern. →

- **Abstraction** is a style of art that emphasizes design and the elements of art. The subject of the artwork may be recognizable or may be an arrangement of shapes, colors, lines, and other elements of art.
- **Abstract art** is based on the natural world, but the forms may be simplified, exaggerated, or distorted; the colors might be altered; and the space might be flattened or distorted.
- **Nonrepresentational** art is not based on the natural world and does not contain objects that are recognizable. It is composed solely from the elements of art. The subject of nonrepresentational art may be color, emotions, or the design of the work itself.

Artists make abstractions for many reasons: to capture the essence of what they see in nature; to create metaphors for ideas; to explore the expressive qualities of color, line, shape, texture, rhythm, etc.; and to use a language of pure form.

Observe: Look and Discuss

Ask the class to look carefully at Alma Thomas's painting and begin to describe what they see. Introduce and define the vocabulary words as you look at the picture. Use some of the following questions to focus your discussion:

- What do you see in the picture?
- How many different colors do you see? Which colors do you see the most? What do the colors make you think of?
- Choose one color and identify all its different shades (for example: green, light green, dark green, yellow green, blue green, etc.) Where do you see the darkest **shade** of the chosen color? Where do you see the lightest shade? In how many parts of the painting do you see the color?
- What **shapes** do you see? Are the shapes repeated in the artwork?
- Do the shapes look flat, or do they look like they have depth and weight? Are they **geometric** or **organic**? What size are the shapes? What do they make you think of?
- Do you notice **lines** in the painting? How did the artist create the lines? In what direction do the lines seem to flow?
- What **patterns** do you see? How would you describe them? If a pattern you see could make a noise, what would it sound like? (Pattern is created by repeated shapes, colors, or lines).
- How would you describe the **texture** of the painting? Can you see individual brush strokes? Do you think the surface of the painting is completely smooth or are there areas that look like they might be rough? (The texture might be difficult to see in reproduction.)

Ask the students what they think the painting is about. What ideas and emotions do they think the artist wanted to express? List these on the board. Make a list of other ideas and emotions an artist might want to express by brainstorming with the class. Tell students the title of the painting. Ask if the title helps them understand what the painting is about. Why or why not?

Explain that the artist was inspired by the view of her garden from her kitchen window. Her painting is an interpretation of the view, but the subject matter (flowers in her garden) is not realistic or recognizable. Her painting is based on nature, but instead of showing a realistic view of her garden, the artist expressed her feelings about it with color, shape, pattern, and line. →

Knowing about an artist's life or what the artist says about his or her work can add to students' understanding of the artwork. However, the interpretations that students come up with based only on observation are equally valid—even if their conclusions differ from what the artist says about her work—as long as students can support their ideas with what they see in the works of art.

Create: Flag Book

Download instructions for the [Flag Book](#) and lead students through the process of creating the book form.

Once students have created the flag book, have them store their books in their folders. They will continue to work with them in Lesson 7.

Reflect

Have students respond to one of the following prompts in their journals, or use the prompts to generate a class discussion about abstraction.

- How does abstraction make you see differently?
- What new questions does abstract art inspire?
- I think Alma Thomas made abstract art because _____.

LESSON EXTENSION: IDEAS FOR STUDENTS WHO WANT TO WRITE OR DRAW MORE

- Write a piece that uses exaggeration or metaphor to express an idea or emotion.
- Use art vocabulary to describe Alma Thomas's painting to someone who hasn't seen it.
- Think of a place you love and create an abstract image of it using only colors and shapes.
- Write a poem, song, or short piece using art vocabulary.