



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will ...

- learn that a variety of organizational principles can be used to create a successful expressionist work of art.
- learn that inspiration for their own work can come from many places one of which is other artists and art movements.



This lesson provided an opportunity for expressionist creativity.

My fifth-grade students have spent the better portion of the year working on realistic-inspired artwork. This lesson seemed like an ideal opportunity to break away and have some expressionist creativity make its way into the art room.

LOOKING AT ART Each table of students had six Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) postcards to share, discuss and investigate. After a few minutes, we participated in a “scavenger hunt.” I began the discussion by asking, “Who can find a geometric shape?” Hands popped up and Kandinsky’s artwork came alive with the help of these fifth-grade detectives.

Other questions posed were, “Can anyone find a repeated line?” “What kinds of lines did Kandinsky use to show depth in his paintings?” and “How is color used to show space?” I was impressed with the responses and dialogue created from this guided discussion.

BEGINNING OUR IMPROVISATIONS Next, students learned that Kandinsky referred to his paintings as “Improvisations,” that is, works created based on the artist’s feelings. They also



learned the term “Expressionist” and how it differed from the Impressionists of the same time period.

We began our own “Improvisation” on a piece of 8" x 12" paper. To get the class going, I asked each student to draw a diagonal line on their paper—any length and any direction. Next, they were instructed to draw a triangle, any size, intersecting that diagonal line.

We proceeded with this technique for the next few steps. They had to include three circles: one that overlapped another shape or line, one that went off their page and one that

KUDOS TO KANDINSKY

by Christine MacPherson



MATERIALS

- Art reproductions and postcards
- 8" x 12" white paper
- Pencils/erasers
- Oil pastels
- Tissues for blending

showed variety from the others. Repeated curvy lines and zigzag lines were also added, along with some kind of checkered pattern inside either a shape or a pair of diagonal lines.

Everyone was given extra time to include additional shapes or lines to balance the positive/negative space of their compositions. As a bonus, their classroom teachers told me that this lesson fit in beautifully with their study of geometry.

ADDING COLOR The second week, we looked at the color wheel. We

talked about how combinations of colors work to show depth and how oil pastels can be used to create texture. They concluded that warm colors pop out and cool colors recede in space.

Complementary colors worked really well in some checkered shapes and monochromatic families were great to balance and unify the background. Some shapes could be scratched off or blended to show a more opaque quality, while others could be layered to appear thick and weighted. A cool color or black, we agreed, would be the contrast color to pull our finished pieces together.

GROUP CRITIQUE Amazingly, almost every student finished this piece in the two weekly, hour-long classes we have together. As students finished, their artwork went on the chalk-

board and gave us the perfect opportunity for a final group critique. I insisted on the students using their new vocabulary words when discussing each other's artworks, rather than the predictable, "I really like this one!"

It was a confirmation to me that they met the objectives when terms like "overlapping shapes," "repeated patterns of lines" and "purple and yellow complementary colors working really well" were all mentioned. As one student put it, "Kandinsky would be proud of all of us Mrs. MacPherson!" (His other question, in true fifth-grade fashion, was "Will mine be going in this year's art show?") ■

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