

Essential Question: What does it mean to have artistic vision? How can a person develop his or her artistic vision?

EUROPEAN (WESTERN) ART:

From the time of the Renaissance leading up to the Impressionist movement of the late 19th century, painting in Europe was focused on a tradition of painting highly detailed, realistic-looking depictions of life. However, the invention of photography contributed to a shift in what many artists felt was important about painting. As Picasso stated, “Why should the artist persist in treating subjects that can be established so clearly with the lens of a camera?” (8, p29)

MODERN ART:

Impressionist painters of the late nineteenth century began to create paintings that used light and color to capture the mood and feel of a moment. Artists such as Georges Seurat used color theory to create paintings of scenes out of a series of small dots of bold colors placed next to each other to be blended in the eye when viewed at a distance (6, p13). As the twentieth century began, European artists also began to integrate styles from outside Europe, from places such as Africa and Asia that were becoming easier to visit and explore because of increased trading between the countries (4, p18).

For example, van Gogh learned to flatten his compositions by looking at art prints from Japan (6, p18). Picasso’s style of painting is thought to have developed in part because of his seeing African masks and sculptures at the Ethnographic Museum at the Palais du Trocadéro (6, p67).

Question: What do you think these artists did in order to learn the styles of these different cultures? By learning about these different artistic traditions, do you think their artwork as individuals became more unique, or do you think their work became less original?

Because of an increasingly large “art market” in which artists were expected to show their work without dealing directly with their end clients, it became more important for them to stand out and be seen as unique from other artists. By introducing something new or different, they could receive better coverage from art critics, who were increasingly becoming the means by which art was judged and valued (4, p17-18).

Not all artists were specifically concerned with the art critics, however. German expressionist artist Emil Nolde argued with both his art dealer and an “eminent” art critic of his time. Instead of painting like the Impressionists to make the viewer sense the piece and calm of nature, Nolde painted to capture “an extreme heightening of intensity” found in human emotion. Unfortunate for Nolde, in 1937 the ruling political party in Germany, the National Socialists (also known as Nazis) determined that his style of painting was “degenerate” and forbade him from painting (6, p49-50).

Question: Why do you think the Nazis found art to be threatening to their cause?

Artists such as Wassily Kandisky used shape, color, and line to create pictures that were “autonomous...free of the ties of objective reality” (4, p173). This new type of art, known as nonobjective art, or in other words art that does not represent an object or setting from real life, was embraced by an artist named Jackson Pollock.

JACKSON POLLOCK:

Artist Jackson Pollock was born in 1912 in Cody, Wyoming and raised in the American West. (7, 8:27). While studying art, he complained to his older brother (who was also a painter) that “My drawing is rotten. it seems to lack freedom, it is cold and lifeless...” (7, 12:20).

During the time of the great depression, artists were hired by the federal government under a program called the “Works Project Administration”, or WPA to create works of art. One of the most prominent of these artists was Thomas Hart Benton who painted murals across the United States. Jackson Pollock studied under Thomas Hart Benton during this time (7, 14:30-17:30).

Pollock, like the modernist artists, had been exposed to art from a variety of cultures. As an example, Pollock participated in an “Experimental Workshop” held by expressive mural artist David Alfaro Siquieros (4, p285). During his time with Siquieros he was taught that he did not have to use the established methods of worked with paint, and he was taught that he could paint by dripping the paint onto the surface of his paintings (7, 17:53) Jackson Pollock also observed how Native Americans did sand paintings on the ground, and consequently many of his paintings were created with the canvas laying on the ground (5, p20). About 1947, Pollock began making “drip paintings”, or paintings created by dripping paint from a stick or brush (5, p22). In the same way that Vincent van Gogh created his paintings without smoothing out the paintstrokes or correcting himself, Jackson Pollock left the paint on the canvas in the way that it had first been placed there (6, p18). Because of the often energetic and exciting way in which this paint was applied, the painting itself became visually exciting. This spontaneous method of painting is known as abstract expressionism.

In order to help the students understand how the evolution of the abstract expressionist movement relates to changes in other forms of art at the time, give them a comparison to music of the early-to-mid twentieth century:

Question: In the early 1900’s, jazz became a popular form of music. How is jazz similar to classical music, and how is it different? In the mid twentieth century, near the same time as Jackson Pollock’s painting, rock and roll became a popular form of music. How is rock and roll different from jazz music? What do do rock and roll music and abstract expressionist painting have in common?

Some time after his job with Benton ended, an art critic named Clement Greenberg wrote an opinion for LIFE magazine (one of the larger American magazines at the time), questioning whether Jackson Pollock was the best painter in America. The next art show Pollock held sold out, and Pollock made \$6500 that year, “almost double the average white-collar salary.” (7, 27:53-29:00)

Question: Why do you think a positive review from an art critic made Pollock’s work sell better?

A few years later, Pollock created a series of black-and-white paintings that were representational and very different from his previous work. Pollock felt that he needed to change and improve his technique as an artist. Not only did “virtually none of those works” sell, he also received a negative review from the art critic who had helped to propel him to success. (7, 30:00-33:00)

Question: Was changing his style a wise decision for Jackson Pollock? Why or why not? Which is more important and why: developing a unique visual style by which people can identify your artwork, or creating artwork that is new, fresh, and original from anything you have done before?

ERIC CARLE:

Question: Before discussing the life and work of illustrator Eric Carle, let's take a look at his work. What do you notice that is similar to work we have seen in this discussion up until this point? [pass out a number of books by Eric Carle so the students can observe]

Eric Carle was born in Germany, lived in America during his childhood and then returned to Germany for most of his adolescence. During the fiercest moments of the fall of Nazi Germany, Eric's art teacher admired his loose, open style of creating pictures, and one day invited him to his house and showed him examples of artwork by Picasso, Klee and other contemporary artists of the time (which were illegal, since Nazi ideology thought these art movements were "degenerate"). (1, p23-24)

Later Eric began attending art college, until one day his professor declared him the "least talented student [he had] taught in forty years of teaching." Eric was expelled from the college, but returned the next morning at which time his professor allowed him to remain in the typography department. Eric attributes the "discipline" he learned during this time of probation as crucial to his later success as an artist. (1, p29)

Question: Why do you think Eric returned to the professor who had insulted his art so greatly?

One of Eric's first books, "A Very Hungry Caterpillar" was originally called "A Week With Willi Worm". The book editor, Ann Beneduce, was not convinced of the worm as a main character, so they discussed different ideas, and decided on a caterpillar as the main character.

After being unable to find a publisher in the United States, they presented it to a Japanese publisher that "[found] a way to produce it." (1, p44) The book has now been published in 28 different languages (1, p118) and has sold over 33 million copies (2).

Eric describes his work as "using simple shapes, often in bright colors against a white background...you almost think of my illustrations...as little posters" (3, p26). Looking at the paste-papers used in his work you can see bold brushstrokes and paint splatter.

Question: Did Eric make the right decision in changing his book to meet the editor's opinion? Why or why not? Is Eric able to claim finished book as his own idea? Does that matter?

Essential Question(focused): In what way did Jackson Pollock and Eric Carle show that they had artistic vision? What decisions did they make that helped to develop this vision?

Conclusion Question: In what area of your life are you particularly skilled or do you feel like you have a unique vision? How can you better develop that skill or vision?

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Lesson Plan - Paste-paper Collages (approx 2-3 class periods)

Objective

Students will:

- **View and analyze examples of abstract expressionist art**
- **Discuss artforms that preceded and resulted from abstract expressionism**
- **Use rhythm as an artistic principle**
- **Use value and color contrast to separate an object from a background**
- **Create a paste-paper collage**

Materials and Tools Needed

Art Books with large pictures of artwork by the following artists:

*Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh, Emil Norde, Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso, Thomas Hart Benton**
*Jackson Pollock (required) - * all others optional but helpful*

Picture books by illustrator *Eric Carle*

Paper, pencils, crayons, markers / Scissors / Colored construction paper

Paint, paintbrushes (optional)

Activity

Day 1: Learning about Abstract Expressionism and Paste-paper collage

Give all your students a piece of paper, and have them draw a picture of an animal. Have the students turn in their picture of the animal. Present a background lesson about the modernist art movement, (presentation ideas on previous page)

Day 2: Creating Paste-papers (about 1/2 class period)

Rhythm is a principle of art that describes the visual movement in a work of art created by repetitions of shapes, colors, lines, or other elements of art. Rhythm in art works similar to rhythm in music. Just like music repeats certain beats, has a specific tempo, and flows in a certain way, artists repeat elements of art and create flows in their artwork to communicate that rhythm to the viewer.

Explain to the students that they will be practicing with different types of song rhythms, and responding with a different element of art for each. Invite the students to get a water cup and fill it about half-way with water and to pick out about three brushes (one big, one medium, one small) to work with and a couple paper towels, and then to return to their seats. Have the students tape a piece of paper to the desk using masking tape on all four corners.

Once the students have their supplies ready, invite them to respond to the first song using line. (crayons or markers on construction paper would work well) Inform the students that they can look at each other's work, but no talking while the song is playing so everyone can focus on the music. Once the song is finished, invite any students who are happy with their results to share their painting, and briefly explain why they painted it the way they did.

Next, invite the students to respond to the next song creating rhythms using texture. Ask for volunteers to suggest ways that texture can be simulated using watercolor paint (ideas include splatter, dry brush, stippling, crunching the bristles against the paper, etc) Demonstrate some of these methods on the board, and then have the students tape down a new piece of paper for this exercise. Begin the song. Once the song is finished, invite any students who are happy with their results to share their painting, and briefly explain why they painted it the way they did.

On the next song have the students experiment with layering shapes next to and on top of each other. Explain that they will be creating rhythms using shape in this exercise. Begin the song. Once the song is finished, invite any students who are happy with their results to share their paper and briefly explain how it follows the rhythm of the selected song.

On the next song, have the students start by taping the new sheet of paper to the table. Instruct the students to wash out their large brush, and use the brush to coat to cover the paper in a layer of water. Explain to the students that for this next painting they will be using a wet-on-wet technique. Explain that they will be responding to the upcoming song using rhythms in color and shape. Begin the song. Once the song is finished, invite any students who are happy with their results to share their painting, and briefly explain why they painted it the way they did.

Return to the animal drawings the students created during the first day. Show examples of similarities that exist between drawings, and also show examples where the drawings are very different. Explain to the students that since each of them come from different backgrounds and experiences, each of them already has his own artistic vision that influences how they draw things. However, like the artists discussed in this lesson, their artistic vision can also grow and develop by being exposed to art from different cultures and locations (explain to them that photography qualifies as art as well).

Explain to your students that they will use their paste-papers just created to make collages in the style of Eric Carle. For their homework they need to choose an animal, research different ways that animal has been drawn, and use that research as inspiration to create their own unique sketch of that animal. That sketch will be used the next day to create a paste-paper collage of their animal.

(note: for earlier grades or a shorter project timeline, the teacher can limit the rhythm exercises, and bring in examples of animal art and/or photos of animals to use as reference)

Suggested Songs: “Intergalactic Planetary” by Beastie Boys, “1234” by Feist, “Porcelain” by Moby, “Zydeco la Louisianne” by Buckwheat Zydeco

Day 3: Explain to the students that they will be using their paste papers to create collages of the animals they have sketched. In order for these animals to stand out on the page, they will need to contrast with their surroundings. For example, if you have an orange cat, and place it against an orange background, the cat will not stand out from its surroundings. Explain that there are two main ways to give an object contrast from the background of a picture. First is through a color contrast. Show a color wheel to the students and explain how opposite ends on the color wheel are complementary colors and create visual contrast.

Explain that the second major type of contrast is a value contrast. In other words, light objects should be placed up against a dark background to stand out, and dark objects should be placed against a light background to stand out. Show Eric Carle’s work again, and ask the students what type of contrast he is using in his illustrations to make them stand out from their backgrounds.

Draw a sketch of an animal on the board, and demonstrate how to break the object into basic shapes. Then demonstrate how to cut out a shape out of paste paper and glue it to the paper.

Allow the students sufficient time to convert their sketches into collages with their paste papers.

Sample Assessment

Excellent 90 to 100	Very Good 80 to 89	Good 70-79	Acceptable 60-69	Unacceptable 59-
Shows exceptional effort. Object identifiable with high level of detail. Lots of detail in background.	Variety of colors. Object is clearly identifiable. Good contrast with background. Many pieces used	Many colors and pieces used. Object not easy to identify. Object blends in with background a bit.	Many colors and pieces used. Object hard to identify. Object blends in with background.	Object cannot be identified. Few colors or pieces used. Shows minimal effort..