

Fourth Grade Art Print

Composition #8 - by Wassily Kandinsky



Helpful Links

Review of Kandinsky's Compositions: <http://www.glyphs.com/art/kandinsky/>

Information about Abstract Art: <http://paintings.name/>

Information about Social Realism: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social Realism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Realism)

Background Info

Wassily Kandinsky was a Russian painter who, at a very early age, was interested in both music and art. He played the violin and the piano, and he saved up his own money at age 14 to buy himself a box of oil paints. He was very drawn to painting the beautiful Russian countryside. As a young man, he traveled to Germany and eventually across Europe. There he was exposed to the great Western works of art, but also to the “new” art of Impressionism and Expressionism. Kandinsky moved to Munich, Germany, which was a center for experimental art much like Paris was in France in the late 1800s and early 1900s. By 1910, Kandinsky was leading the way with a whole new concept of painting. He is considered to be the first abstract painter - that is, he totally abandoned the idea that a painting had to be of something real or represent something concrete. His paintings became non-objective, in that there was no object in the painting. They were, however, about something. They were about pure color and form. And, they were about the inner feelings and spirit of the artist. Kandinsky came to this understanding about painting in what he describes as an accident. He returned to his studio one night at twilight. “I was suddenly confronted by a picture of indescribably and incandescent loveliness. Bewildered, I stopped; staring at it. The painting lacked all subject; depicted no identifiable object and was entirely composed of bright color patches. Finally, I approached closer and, only then recognized it for what it was, my own painting, standing on its side on the easel.”

This insight, that color conveyed emotion irrespective of content, spurred Kandinsky to take the bold step of discarding realism altogether. He also made the analogy to music – that the pure sounds and forms of music could evoke great feelings without being about something. Therefore, pure color, form, and line could do the same in art. He experimented with two types of paintings: “Compositions”, in which he consciously arranged shapes and colors; and “Improvisations”, where he exerted no control over the paint he applied spontaneously. With bright colors and loose brushwork, Kandinsky created completely non-objective paintings with titles like, *Composition #8*, as abstract as his canvases.

Discussion Ideas

Begin by placing the art print up without talking about the title or the artist (you could have it already up while the children are coming in and getting settled for discussion).

Ask the children to describe what they see. What makes them think so? Ask if anyone sees something different. Turn the painting on its side or upside-down and see if they have any different comments or reactions.

Some other questions might be: What is this painting of or about? Do you think the artist was trying to tell you about something in particular? If it is not about a subject, what else could it be about? If it is so hard to tell what is about, why do you think the artist painted this way?

Do you think a painting in which you can tell more easily what it's about takes more talent to do, or is a better painting one where it is hard to tell what it's about? What makes you think so? Which type do you prefer? In what way might a painting where you can't see a subject be better than one that is realistic?

You may introduce the idea of abstraction, that an artist can change or distort the way something looks or use paintings just to express feelings, or even express the joy of color and paint without having any recognizable subject. You might start by asking if anyone can define abstraction. Most kids know it when they see it, but have a hard time with words. This may not seem like something new or a big deal to kids. Let them know that for almost 400 years before this, paintings from the Western world were about something, usually a story from history or from the Bible. It was considered important that the subject of the painting, particularly the people, look quite real. It wasn't until around 1885 that artists experimented more with the effects of light and paint and worried less about things looking real. You could bring along a very realistic painting for comparison to illustrate this point.

Project Idea

Choose two very contrasting pieces of music to play – one that is very lyrical and smooth, or obviously happy or peaceful; and one that is very jazzy or rhythmic, or dark and moody. You might use a laptop or Ipod or whatever you have to play the music. You will have to do this in both classrooms, so you may either choose the same two pieces for both classes or have different ones, whichever works for you.

Give each student two large pieces of paper to paint or draw on. The students must respond to the music – pick colors and just paint the way the music feels to them - encourage them to be abstract, simply using colors, shapes and lines to illustrate their feelings. Afterwards, display the paintings from the same musical piece together. Pastels could also work well for this.