

ABSTRACTION

*A University of New Mexico Art Museum
Video / Slide Presentation*

Teacher's Guide by:

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Introduction:

This is one of a series of publications of the University of New Mexico Art Museum for educators to use in art and humanities-oriented instruction. The series highlights artwork from the University Art Museum's permanent collection. Previous titles are:

- 1) Narration in Art
- 2) Art and Nature
- 3) Old Spain, New Spain, New Mexico: An Enduring Tradition
- 4) Georgia O'Keeffe and the Stieglitz Circle

Each multi-media packet includes:

- 1) Background text on the artwork and artists
- 2) Teacher's Guide keyed to grades Pre-K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12
- 3) Appendix: Painting Glossary, SCAMPER, Classroom Connections
- 4) 1 VHS Videotape
- 5) 10 Slides / Slidelist

Program and Objectives:

Art museums offer opportunities for learning during the school years and beyond. The materials in this binder are designed to introduce teachers to the unique educational potential of original artwork in museums. The **Teacher's Guide** provides instructional strategies designed to increase students' perceptual skills, to engage them in critical thinking, and to captivate them with creative problem solving. Use the discussion questions, writing assignments, and art studios to complement a museum visit or as a self-contained unit of study. **Classroom Connections**, in the Appendix, suggests teaching strategies that apply the process of abstraction to language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and gifted seminar. Teaching materials support the National Standards for Art Education.

A group of artists, educators, museum staff, and consultants collaborated in a week-long institute at the University of New Mexico in June 2001, to infuse these materials with classroom reality. They examined abstraction as a concept, process and art form through gallery tours, "games," discussions, and by sketching and painting. Explorers included Cynthia Alfini, Jeanne Birkhead, Michael Certo, Jeanne Chaney, Paula Knarr, M. Virginia Mora de Lazo, Karen Morgan, Sara Otto-Diniz, Lauren Sittnick, Natalie

Wahi, Peter Walch, and Elizabeth Watts. The authors are grateful for the generosity of spirit and inquiry that each participant brought to this project. We also acknowledge the valuable assistance of Dr. Melinda M. Mayer, University of NorthTexas, for her evaluation of the binder text and educational materials.

Note to Educators:

Each of the following grade-specific (Pre-K to Grade 2, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12) sections of teaching materials include topics for small group discussions, writing assignments, and painting studios. Each section builds on its predecessor. For instance, students in Grades 6-8 will be expected to know and use the vocabulary listed in Pre-K to Grade 2, and Grades 3-5. Student use of “art language” encourages depth of understanding and fosters more precise communication. Teachers often discover that the art environment can be uniquely conducive in advancing motivation for language acquisition among ESL students. Please reproduce the **Painting Glossary** in the Appendix for older students’ use.

In the art studio, all students, except those in advanced painting classes, will benefit from participating in the **Painting Warm-Ups**. You, however, know your students best. Fifth grade students with little painting experience may best develop competence by completing the Painting Warm Ups, and those for Pre-K—Grade 2 before advancing to the studio designed for Grades 3-5.

Abstraction as a concept, as a process, as an art form, and as a tool for education is both multi-faceted and open-ended. To facilitate creative discussions in the classroom, the art gallery, and the painting studio, teachers will discover the playful use of **SCAMPER** strategies (see the Appendix) to be effective. Please reproduce the **SCAMPER** sheet as needed. Also in the Appendix, **Classroom Connections** suggests teaching strategies which apply the process of abstraction to language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and gifted seminar.

Trust yourself. With sharp eyes, an open mind, and thoughtful discussion with students and peers, the world of abstraction is yours to discover!

Introduction to Painting Studio

Tools and Materials—

Newspaper	Water containers	Sponges, rags, etc.
Tempera paint	Paint brushes, various sizes	Water containers
Sketch paper	Painting paper, various sizes	Paper towels
Egg cartons		

Painting Warm-Ups—

All age groups and levels of competency can utilize these warm-ups. Gaining confidence with new tools and materials can only be accomplished through practice.

1) Explore the Paint

Demonstrate the following four painting techniques and give students ample time to practice them. Can students “invent” others?

- a) Wet on Wet: wet paper with sponge and clean water; load brush with paint, apply to wet paper, and watch the magic!
- b) Wet on Dry: load brush with paint, apply to dry paper.
- c) Dry on Wet: blot brush on paper towel, load with paint, apply to wet paper.
- d) Dry on Dry: blot brush on paper towel, load with paint, apply to dry paper.
- e) Double Load: load brush with light-colored paint, dip tip into 2nd color paint, apply to paper. Experiment with wet and dry brushes and papers.

2) Mix It Up

Use an egg carton lid as a palette, or mixing tray, and tempera paints in the primary colors, black, and white. Demonstrate how to scoop up paint with a brush and deposit it on the palette. Add a second color to the first, and mix.

Tip: It's easier to add a darker color to a lighter color. Give students ample time to play with the paints, create new colors and teach each other how to make them. Try mixing colors on your painting paper.

3) You Make the Grade!

Use an egg carton lid as a palette, and tempera paints in one primary color, black, and white. Cut 12" x 18" painting paper into 4" x 18" strips. Have students divide the length into 7 sections (5 sections for younger students). Paint the center section with a pure, primary color. Make a lighter tint by adding white, and paint the next square to the right that color. Lighten the tint with more

white, and paint the next square to the right that color. Make shades by adding a little black to the original hue. Paint the squares to the left of the primary color in graded shades.

4) Student's Choice

How else can we explore the paint? Let students design their own Painting Warm-Ups and take turns teaching the class.

Painting Studio Set-Up—

Organize classroom with a materials table, and four-desk cluster. Each student in the cluster has a specific responsibility for set-up and clean-up (e.g. cover desks with newspaper; clean up newspaper). Other jobs entail collecting painting paper, paintbrushes and water, and paints.

Pre-K to Grade 2: Gesture Painting

Objective—

To develop a vocabulary for use in looking at, discussing, and writing about visual art.

To create an abstract, gesture painting by responding to music.

Vocabulary—

Introduce words, write on board, generate class definitions.
See Painting Glossary in Appendix.

Color

Repetition

Space

Line

Shape

Texture

To Discuss—Gesture as Expression

- 1) What is a gesture? How do students express themselves through gestures? Have students gesture “come,” “stop,” “yes,” etc. Who else uses gestures? (actors, athletes, dancers, animal trainers, traffic police, music conductors).
- 2) Look at Ray Parker’s *No. 131* or William Wiley’s *Broken Toys* in the gallery, slides, or video. Ask students to identify gestural marks—movements of the brush or painting cloth—and act/dance them. What do these marks create? (lines, shapes, textures). Are the gestures fast/slow, curving/jagged, smooth/rough? Do they repeat? What do they express?

To Write—Painters as Poets

Using the vocabulary above and from your discussion, engage students in writing a class poem about their experiences as painters. Suggestions for these age groups include:

- 1) Complete the phrase, “I am a painter...”
- 2) Begin each line of the poem with a letter in the word PAINTER
- 3) Write a haiku, a Japanese poem of three lines with 5-7-5 syllables

- 4) Or write a diamante, a five-line poem composed of 1 noun on line one, 2 adjectives on line two, 3 verbs on line three, 2 adjectives on line four, and the original noun on line five.

Students may write individual poems after learning how to write poems through the group process.

To Paint—Gesture Painting to Music

- 1) Set up room and materials, and engage students in Painting Warm-Ups (see Introduction to Painting Studio).
- 2) Demonstrate how to paint a background for your gesture painting. Use a sponge or large paintbrush to cover the entire paper surface quickly. The paint does not have to be dry to continue.
- 3) Play instrumental music* and show how to paint a gesture in the air to the music. Ask students to describe what the music makes them feel. What gestures can they make that refer to the music? Invite students to “paint” in the air and dance to the music.
- 4) What colors does the music suggest? Let students choose their colors freely and “paint” the music. As they paint on paper, they may use a large brush for louder sections and a smaller brush for quieter passages. Or, a broad, flowing brush may suggest slow music and a thin brush may depict staccato, or punctuated, passages.

Post-Production Discussion—

- 1) Pin up paintings.
- 2) Play the music that inspired the students' work. Have them listen to it again, and remember what they were feeling while they were painting.
- 3) Ask students to share their experiences as painters.

* Musical suggestions: Debussy, Clair de Lune; Trinidad steel drums; Bach, Goldberg Variations; Native American flute music; Copland, Billy the Kid; Gershwin, Rhapsody in Blue; Beethoven, “Ode to Joy” from Symphony No. 9; Vivaldi, The Four Seasons; Louis Armstrong, “Cheek to Cheek,” George Harrison, “Here Comes the Sun.”

Grades 3-5: Modern Painting is an Adventure

Objective—

To describe formal qualities and organizational structures of art;

To create a pattern painting while playing with a single motif.

Vocabulary—

Review previous vocabulary, introduce new words, write on the board, generate class definitions. See Painting Glossary in Appendix.

Geometric

Non-objective

Overlapping

Motif

Organic

Pattern

To Discuss—Modern Painting Is an Adventure

- 1) Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students each. Write the following topics onto paper strips, and place in an Adventure Hat or Pith Helmet. Each group will choose a paper strip topic to guide its discussion of a painting (Karl Benjamin's *#15* or Werner Drewes's *Friendly Formations* or John McLaughlin's *#1* are suggested). Allow time for in-depth dialogue. Conclude with presentations from each group to the class at large. How did the topics influence what students saw?

- 2) Paper Strip Discussion Topics
 - a) Find a pattern. Is the motif a shape, line, or color? Describe the motif (geometric or organic) and then the pattern.
 - b) I imagine the painting has a twin painted in different colors. How does this help you to understand the role color plays in the pattern?
 - c) Pretend that the painting is a person. What does he/she like and dislike? Describe his/her personality.
 - d) Remember what you thought when you first saw the painting. How did you react to its size, formal elements (color, line, shape), and the way it was painted?
 - e) Do you think that the painting means anything? If so, what? Be sure to support your ideas with references to the painting.

To Write—Postcard to a Friend

Distribute 4" x 6" card stock to students to create art postcards. Using colored pencils, each student will copy a section of one of the paintings on the front. On the back, he/she will divide the card in half with a vertical line and will write the address of a close friend on the right side. On the left, the student will write to his/her friend about the painting.

To Paint—The Shapes of Things

- 1) Survey the classroom, students' clothing, and natural history specimens to identify geometric and organic shapes. Describe the patterns they make.
- 2) Show students how to make a shape template out of cardboard. Demonstrate how to trace the shape onto 18" x 24" paper repeatedly to create a pattern. Shapes can overlap or touch; be positive or negative; minify or magnify. See **SCAMPER** in the Appendix for other possibilities. Save pattern drawings.
- 3) Set up room for painting studio, and engage students in Painting Warm-Ups (see Introduction to Painting Studio). Do Gesture Painting to Music if necessary to help students attain confidence as painters.
- 4) Demonstrate how to apply a sheer, background wash over the pattern drawing so that the pencil lines show through. Have students do the same. Let the paint dry. Ask students to plan the colors they will use for their pattern painting before they begin. Allow ample time for students to experience success.
*Other Options—Students may create complex patterns by using more than one motif or a combination of organic and geometric shapes.

Post Production Discussion—

- 1) Pin up paintings.
- 2) Focus discussion on the patterns used. How does color/shape/space function in defining each pattern?
- 3) Some art critics have said that abstract art liberates artists from the chains of representation. What do you think this means? Describe your experience of painting and playing with patterns. Did you feel free or restrained? Explain.

Grades 6-8: Journey to Abstraction

Objective—

To explore abstraction as a process or journey from reality;

To create an abstract painting of an interior space.

Vocabulary—

Review previous vocabulary, introduce new words, write on the board, generate class definitions. See Painting Glossary in Appendix.

Abstract

Composition

Formal

Balance

Contrast

Scale

To Discuss—The Process of Abstraction

A painter may use an experience from life—the sky (Buffy Johnson's *Empyrean*), a dance around a campfire (Bobby Hicks's *Untitled*), or an interior space (Rosalind Bengelsdorf's *Untitled*, see video)—and abstract it, or reduce it to its essence.

- 1) Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students each. Using the original paintings, slides, the video, or art reproductions, let each group choose an image to discuss in depth. The questions listed under #2 below will help to focus discussion. Allow ample time for in-depth dialogue. Conclude with presentations from each group to the class at large.
- 2) Discussion Topics
 - a) Generate a group definition of "process".
 - b) Describe the formal elements (color, line, shape, texture, space) of the painting.
 - c) What mood is evoked? How do formal elements convey this mood?
 - d) What experience from life does the painting suggest? How does the abstract painting differ from a detailed representation of the same event?
 - e) Through what process does the artist abstract from reality?

To Write—“The play/the dance is the thing...”

Choose one of the abstract paintings discussed above to be the backdrop for a stage set. What else might the set include? Which characters are in the play/dance? Write a synopsis of the story line and title the dance or drama.

To Paint—Journey to Abstraction

- 1) Set up room and materials, and engage students in Painting Warm-Ups (see Introduction to Painting Studio). Do Gesture Painting to Music and Paint the Shapes of Things, if appropriate.
- 2) Survey the classroom to identify geometric shapes. List/draw on the blackboard for future reference. Brainstorm ways to playfully manipulate these shapes (distribute **SCAMPER** from the Appendix).
- 3) Have students fold a piece of paper in half, and then into thirds to mark six sections. This will be their thumbnail sketch page of ideas. In one box, they will represent the room as it really looks. In the remaining five boxes, they will sketch abstractions based on the first drawing and inspired by SCAMPER. They may focus on a single object or an area of the room; one SCAMPER direction or several. Which thumbnail will they choose to develop?
- 4) Have students paint in a background wash on an 18" x 24" piece of paper. When dry, they will decide either to paint the abstraction of the room directly on the paper or to sketch it first.
- 5) Students will title their paintings when dry.

Post Production Discussion—

- 1) Pin up paintings.
- 2) Divide class into small groups for more intimate discussion. Invite students to share their experiences of the journey from reality to abstraction. Encourage them to show their initial sketch, thumbnails, and final painting to their small group. How can they apply what they learned in this exercise to another area of their lives?

Grades 9-12: "What's it all about?"

Objective—

To interpret the meanings of abstract paintings;

To conceive and create an abstract self-portrait.

Vocabulary—

Review previous vocabulary, introduce new words, write on the board, generate class definitions. See **Painting Glossary** in Appendix.

Emphasis

Three-dimensional

Unity

Movement

Two-dimensional

Variety

To Discuss— "And, I quote..."

Choose one of the following quotations to discuss in a small group with reference to a specific painting (see Glen Goldberg's *Whirly 35* and Lucy Maki's *Fanfare*).

- a) "Painting is like a thundering collision of different worlds that are destined in and through conflict to create that new world called the work. Technically, every work of art comes into being in the same way as the cosmos--by means of catastrophes, which ultimately create out of the cacophony of the various instruments that symphony we call the music of the spheres."

Wassily Kandinsky (Russian, 1866-1944)

- b) "I found that I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way--things that I had no words for."

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887-1986)

- c) "One learns about painting by looking at and imitating other painters. I can't stress enough how important it is, if you are interested at all in painting, to look and to look a great deal at painting. There is no other way to find out about painting."

Frank Stella
(American, 1936-)

To Write—Reporter’s Assignment

The Art Editor of the local newspaper has assigned you to attend the opening of “Abstraction,” and to write a review of the exhibition for Sunday’s edition. Be sure to invite the public and suggest what they can expect to gain aesthetically or intellectually from this art experience. Propose questions about the art for them to ponder.

To Paint—Portraits of the Artists

This art studio is designed for students in an art class, gifted seminar, or a language arts unit on autobiography. Ideally, it will take place over the course of 6-9 weeks.

- 1) Prior to this unit, engage students in Painting Warm-Ups (see Introduction to Painting Studio). Do Gesture Painting to Music, Paint The Shapes of Things, and Journey to Abstraction, if appropriate.
- 2) Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 students. Distribute examples of representational portraits (see Gilbert Stuart’s portrait of Washington on the dollar bill, Rembrandt in a library book, or examples from language arts or social studies textbooks), and abstract paintings. Ask each group to list three ways in which representational paintings differ from abstractions, e.g.:

REPRESENTATIONAL

depicts the visible
documents reality concretely
uses color realistically
creates the illusion of space

ABSTRACT

depicts the invisible, the audible, etc.
documents ideas symbolically
uses color expressively
embraces the two-dimensional canvas

- 3) Set out paper, charcoal and/or pastels, mirrors. Have each student fold a piece of paper in half, and then into thirds to mark six sections. This will be a thumbnail sketch page of ideas. First, ask students to study their faces in the mirrors. In one box, they will sketch diagrams showing the shapes of their faces and layout of eyes, noses, ears, mouths, etc.. In another, they will draw representational portraits. In the remaining boxes, they will sketch a series of abstractions. Students may include abstract images which reflect their

interests (e.g. a musical instrument, a sport, a place) and/or be inspired by **SCAMPER** (see Appendix).

- 4) Each student will work with a partner to define his/her studio project. What do they want to express about themselves? How?

Post Production Discussion—

- 1) Pin up abstract portraits.
- 2) Have students present their self-portraits in small groups. What did students learn about themselves while painting self-portraits? What did they learn about each other? What ideas for future art projects did this experience generate?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Exploring abstraction in the visual arts opens the doors to abstracting in other fields. Use the suggestions below as thresholds from which to enter the world of abstraction in a particular discipline but be sure to visit other rooms, too. Trans-disciplinary learning yields the greatest rewards.

Language Arts—Summary, Synopsis, Outline, Précis, Translation

Pre-K-Gr. 2—Teacher reads a picture book to the class. Each child writes a 3 sentence summary postcard to his/her family about it. Practice, practice, practice.

Gr. 3-5— Learner creates a poster book report by illustrating the core moment of a story and writing a three-sentence synopsis. Display posters in the library.

Gr. 6-8— Student distills the essence of a short story, chapter from a novel or act in a play into an outline or précis. Do it weekly.

Gr. 9-12— Teen translates the meaning of a short story, novel or play into a dance, dialogue, mathematical formula, musical composition, painting, poem.

Mathematics—Number, Fraction, Algebra, Geometry

Pre-K-Gr. 2—Each child chooses a favorite number and represents it in as many ways as possible (concretely with beans, knots on a rope, Cuisinaire rods, as a diagram of addition or subtraction, on a clock face, etc.). Invent new numbers.

Gr. 3-5— Each learner chooses a favorite fraction (ratio, relationship of numbers) to represent in as many ways as possible. Encourage creativity.

Gr. 6-8— Teacher writes an algebraic equation on the board, and students write word problems for it.

Gr. 9-12— Teens measure and draw to scale plan views of their homes/apartments. What can they theorize about the distribution of space? Is the theory true for all homes/apartments? Write theorem.

Science—Botany, Biology, Geology, Astronomy

Pre-K-Gr. 2—Each child expresses the essence of a tree in a dance, drawing, diagram, play, poem, story.

Gr. 3-5— Learners write basic definitions of animal families--amphibians, birds, fish, insects, mammals, reptiles.

Gr. 6-8— Students research a rock or mineral and represent it on a poster (chemical composition, Moh's scale number, crystalline structure, location, history, etc.).

Gr. 9-12— Teens illustrate the movements of bodies in a galaxy.

Social Studies—Community, State, Culture, Freedom

Pre-K-Gr. 2—Discuss “community” with class--who, what, where, how, why. Each child writes and illustrates a short definition. Display.

Gr. 3-5— Discuss their state with the class--geography, history, people and places, natural resources, arts and cultural resources, science and technology. Each learner chooses one topic to visually represent on a poster map of the state.

Gr. 6-8— After studying another culture, student summarizes its distinctive characteristics in a poem.

Gr. 9-12— After studying war (Revolutionary, Civil, World Wars, etc.) teen expresses freedom in a dance, monumental sculpture, poem, painting, or musical performance.

APPENDIX

PAINTING GLOSSARY

ABSTRACTION	process of drawing or extracting from reality; paintings which use the vocabulary of art—color, line, shape, texture, space—to express moods, ideas, feelings and relationships.
BALANCE	principle of design; arrangement of the elements of design to create a sense of equilibrium. Three types of balance are symmetrical, asymmetrical and radial.
COLOR	element of design; hue, tint, shade or intensity of an object as seen by the human eye. Primary colors are red, blue, yellow; secondary colors , formed by combining any two primary colors, are orange, green, violet. Analogous colors are beside each other in the color wheel, e.g. blue/green; complementary colors are opposite each other on the color wheel, e.g. red/green. Warm colors (red, orange, yellow) remind us of fire, sunsets, heat; cool colors (blue, green, violet) remind us of sky, water, mountains. Achromatic means to be without color, e.g. black, white, gray; monochromatic uses a single color with variations; polychromatic includes many colors.
COMPOSITION	the way an artist uses elements and principles of design to achieve a unified work of art.
CONTRAST	principle of design; way in which an element of design is used in combination to emphasize differences, e.g. warm colors to which a cool color is added.
DRY BRUSH	method of painting in which the brush is loaded with paint, and is dragged across the dry surface of a painting for a rough effect.
EMPHASIS	principle of design; use of element of design to draw attention to a specific focus in the work of art.
GESTURE	movement of the hands or body as a means of communication, e.g. speaking/writing in the air; drawing or painting in which hand gestures are represented visually, as with charcoal or paint.
IMPASTO	thick, dry application of paint.

LINE	element of design; the path created by a moving dot.
MOTIF	unit that is repeated in a pattern.
MOVEMENT	principle of design; arrangement of elements of design to create a sense of motion and lead the viewer's eye through the work of art.
NON-OBJECTIVE	art without a recognizable subject; non-representational.
OVERLAPPING	relational state between two or more elements or objects in which one is in front of another.
PAINTING	form of art in which pigment suspended in a liquid medium is applied to a canvas or other surface.
PATTERN	the repetition of a motif according to a predictable plan.
REPETITION	principle of design; use of an element of design again and again to form a pattern or to create a rhythm.
SCALE	size in relation to a standard.
SCUMBLING	method of softening the outlines or color of a painting by applying a thin coat of opaque color
SHAPE	element of design; two-dimensional area defined by a boundary, such as geometric circles, rectangles, triangles; or organic , free-form outlines.
SPACE	element of design; the empty area around a positive shape.
UNITY	principle of design; quality of a work of art when all of its parts are balanced, in harmony and consistent.
TEXTURE	element of design; the look and/or feel of a surface (rough, smooth, lumpy, silky).
THREE-DIMENSIONAL	having length, width, and depth.
TWO-DIMENSIONAL	having length and width.

S C A M P E R

SCAMPER invites us to approach learning playfully. For instance, if we choose the direction “substitute” while in an art museum, we will change the colors of a painting in our minds. In imagining this new painting and comparing it to the original, we may understand better the artist’s choice of colors as well as the painting’s meaning.

Write the verbs and suggestions on slips of paper and let each student pick one from the Adventure Hat to guide thinking during a class period or in the gallery, to inspire painting during an art studio, or to stimulate creativity in a writing assignment. See additional uses for SCAMPER in the Teacher’s Guide.

- S** **substitute** **who else instead? what else?**
- simplify** **distill the essence, remove complexity**
- C** **combine** **combine purposes! combine ideas! how about a blend!**
- A** **adapt** **what else is like this?**
- M** **modify** **change meaning, color, form, motion**
- MAGNIFY** **A A NG N N A G**
- minify** **what to subtract? smaller? lighter?**
- multiply** **increase, expand, reproduce**
- P** **put to other uses** **new ways to use it? Other uses?**
- E** **eliminate** **what parts can be taken out! change the function!**
- R** **reverse** **turn it around, upside down, backwards?**
 Rearrange, change order, plan, layout, or scheme