

# Exploration of Abstraction

## Inspiration

Jean Hélion

## Grade Level

K-12

## Project Time

2+ 1-hour sessions

## Author

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## > Objectives

### Students will:

- Learn about abstract art
- Create an abstract shape collage in either 2 or 3-D assemblage format, based upon realistically drawn objects
- Explore elements of shape, color, line, and texture and the principles of balance, rhythm, and unity

## > Materials

- Objects or images
- Drawing pencils
- Assorted papers
- Cardstock
- Chipboard
- Paint
- Brushes
- Oil pastels
- Scissors
- Glue
- **Optional:** Sumi ink or watercolor, acrylic paint pens, texture tools, wax linen thread and needles, X-acto knives, gold leaf flakes, and charcoal

Example



## > Description

The twentieth century was a time of rapid artistic change when preconceived traditional concepts in art were challenged. Many works presented classic subjects in a new way, and shifted the boundaries between representation and abstraction. Abstract art is art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of visual reality but instead uses shapes, colors, forms, and gestural marks to achieve its effect. This project invites students to explore the process of abstraction using an object or issue as the source of inspiration.

## > Vocabulary

**Abstraction:** A style of art that begins in reality, but may be expressed through simplification, stylization, fragmentation, reassembly, and distortion.

**Rhythm:** A combination of elements repeated, but with variations.

**Unity:** The result of elements that combine to make a balanced, harmonious, complete whole.

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## > Warm Up Activity

Explore abstract art images in student pairs. Look closely together and discuss the dominant elements of art and principles of design.

## > Essential Questions

What is abstract art? What elements are used in abstract art to provoke ideas, emotions or thoughts? What are some of the methods abstract artists use to portray familiar objects in new ways?

## > Adaptation Suggestions

**Younger Students:** Have groups work together to create a set of shape templates from their drawings of the same object, which can then be shared. Consider multiple small-scale collages to create a mini-series.

**Older Students:** Abstract art is often seen as carrying a moral dimension. Consider sourcing objects or images that explore a particular issue. Consider collaborative work contrasting two views on an issue or object within a single collage. Offer inclusion of handwritten words as an option within the project.

## > Extension Activities

**Younger Students:** Describe your process in creating this abstract image. How did you succeed in seeing your object in a new way? Describe what you now see.

**Older Students:** What is the significance of the object or social issue you chose? Describe how you applied simplification, stylization, fragmentation, and/or distortion to revise work into abstraction. What is the unifying element in your work?

## > Assessment

### Teacher assessment of student work:

- Evidence of simplification, distortion, and/or fragmentation
- Effective use of color, value, and texture
- Effective use of negative space
- Use of principles of rhythm, balance, and contrast
- Effective communication of object or social issue

**Step 1**



**Step 1:** Identify subject(s) for the project: object, figure, image related to social issue, etc. Create a 15-minute drawing of the object. Identify and sketch the individual shapes from the drawing to simplify and begin the abstraction process. Consider distorting or even fragmenting these shapes. Use all these shapes as inspiration for the collage.

**Step 2**



**Step 2:** Select a limited color palette associated with the object (e.g., black, white, brown, and green). Using paint and pastels, create a series of textured surfaces on paper and cardboard that relate back to the object.

**Step 3**



**Step 3:** Using the individual shape sketch as reference, cut painted surfaces into shape pieces until you have enough shapes to represent the object at least a few times.

**Step 4:** Begin the composition, arranging the shapes in such a way that your object is recognizable, but not a clear reproduction. Consider overlapping shapes and the use of negative space.

**Step 5:** Glue shapes into place. (For 3-D, splice and notch). Add final touches and any additional materials to create a unified image.

## Notes

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**Step 4**



**Step 5**

