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# Discover the original artwork of Wassily Kandinsky



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Introduce children Wassily Kandinsky's original artwork. Get them used to abstract art, its graphic appearance and the music that inspired the artist to create his rhythmic, colourful pieces.

Using this sheet, you can encourage children to experiment with abstract art, each activity is aimed at bringing the music to life on paper. The activities will develop children's attention span, sensitivity and creativity. During one or several sessions they can take on the role of a composer, by cutting and drawing.

Wassily said, "White sounds like silence, the nothing before it all begins," so get your paper ready!

**Historical period:** 20th century - Abstract Expressionism.

Vassily Kandinsky, was born in Moscow on 4th December 1866 and died at Neuilly-sur-Seine on 13th December 1944. He was a Russian painter, printmaker, art theorist, poet and playwright who was granted German, then Ukranian, then French nationality in 1939. Considered one of the most important artists of the 20th century alongside, most notably Picasso and Matisse, he is one of the founders of abstract art.

His wife, Nina Kandinsky left all the Kandinsky works in her possession to the Georges-Pompidou centre in Paris.

## Context and analysis of the artwork

### Context

Wassily Kandinsky was born in Russia in 1866, he was to live in several other countries: Ukraine, Germany and lastly France where he was awarded French nationality in 1939. He came from a wealthy background and studied law before working as an assistant teacher. In spite of his affection and sensitivity for art, he only started taking Fine Arts classes when he was 30 years old. He was to publish his art theories: he believed that painting had a spiritual dimension, allowing it to express the feelings of a human soul.

Music was a source of inspiration to him, just as colours were emotions they were also sounds (a lyrical abstraction); which is why his most accomplished paintings were called "improvisations" or even "compositions".

Kandinsky's art is the result of long periods of reflection, his paintings are carefully studied, geometry plays a very important role: lines, curves, circles, dots, squares...like music notes on paper.

### Analysis of the artwork

#### 1. In terms of shape

This piece "Composition no.VIII" is an oil on canvas from 1923, its dimensions are 140 x 201cm, you can see it at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

#### 2. In technical terms

Numerous geometric elements' appear on a light background, criss-crossing and overlapping as if suspended. Every colour appears from black to white, flat, layered and in a checkered pattern.

#### 3. In terms of significance

At first sight this painting may appear to be muddled, but it isn't at all. Abstract art is only figurative; we might believe that the artist was playing completely freely, but Kandinsky followed the theories of the shapes and colours he created. As an audience we are presented with a dreamlike piece of musical artwork that each of us is free to imagine and interpret as we wish.

#### 4. In terms of use

Wassily Kandinsky is a pioneer of abstract art; whether he is the founder is still to be argued. Whatever the case, he remains an emblematic figure of the abstract art movement. Many of his works can be found at the Georges-Pompidou Centre in Paris.

# 1 - Educational objectives: children 2-6 years old



## Material:

- Canson Colorline paper (220gr/m<sup>2</sup>) A4 : cream
- Felt tips

## Objectives:

- To master colouring and line drawing
- An initiation into abstract art
- To develop concentration and sensitivity

## How it works:

Explain the following to the children at the beginning of the session:

1- You'll hear an extract of orchestra music (preferably classical music and not too short a piece). The aim of the first play through is to pick out various sounds, soft or sharp, and the rhythm, calm or fast.

2 - On the second play through tell the children that they should write the music down on paper using shapes.

Show them one of Kandinsky's Compositions so that they can visualise the concept of lyrical abstraction.

List together a range of geometric shapes which you can leave for them to look at: all sizes of circles, half-circles, angles, sloping angles, triangles, dots, squares, curves, waves etc.

Next, show them an example: listen to an excerpt of the piece, draw shapes on the board inspired by the music (soft notes are circular and curved, more dynamic percussion means little squares or triangles etc.)

Give each child a piece of light coloured Canson® A4 paper.

Listen to the excerpt again, with the music guiding them get each child to draw the shapes they want to on their Canson® paper in black felt-tip: use household items to make circles, a

ruler for straight lines and the rest can be free hand.

The aim of this exercise is to show children just how many possibilities there are to create using simple shapes: layer them, criss-cross them, line them up, multiply them, group them together, spread them out...

Next ask them to add colour to their 'score' using felt-tips and pencil crayons to create different textures.

## 2 - Educational objectives: children 7-11 years old



### Material:

- Canson Colorline Paper (220gr/m<sup>2</sup>): a range in all different colours
- Black Felt-tip
- Scissors and glue

### Objectives:

- To develop sensitivity and creativity
- Create a harmonious composition

### How it works:

This activity can be carried out individually or in pairs.

Explain the concept of lyrical abstraction to the children, show them one of Kandinsky's Compositions and discuss their perception of the painting together: the sounds that the shapes and colours may represent.

Then dissect the painting: list the graphical elements (circles, half-circles, angles, sloping angles, triangles, dots, squares, curves, waves etc.) This range of shapes will be their palette.

Listen to a piece of classical music together, pinpoint the different sounds and rhythms with them. On the second play through tell the children to represent the music using paper cut-outs. When they are listening to the track, they can cut out their music notes in different colours of Canson® paper. They can punctuate their graphic cut-outs using black felt-tip.

Next let them assemble these notes to create a composition: they can glue the papers together, however they wish, to create a harmonious collage which is solid enough to be hung on the wall.

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