

THE TOTAL TRAGEDY OF A GIRL NAMED HAMLET

Erin Dionne

LESSON PLAN:

Getting Into Painting: Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock

Grades Four – Eight

Focus: In this lesson, students will be introduced to the paintings of Jackson Pollock by viewing prints of his work and attempting to replicate his process of action painting.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Embrace the idea of getting into their paintings by working on the floor rather than a table or easel.
- Expand their ability to control the splatter of paint through careful hand, wrist, shoulder and body movements.
- Create expressive, but non-representational, compositions that show evidence of the use of line, balance, depth, and movement.
- Book(s) on Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock:



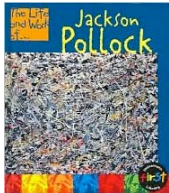
Abstract Expressionism, David Anfam



Reframing Abstract Expressionism, Michael Leja



Action/Abstraction, Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed.



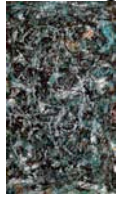
Jackson Pollock, Leonie Bennett

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Resources (continued):

- Images of Pollock's work:



Full Fathom Five, Jackson Pollock 1947



Eyes in the Heat, Jackson Pollock 1946



Blue Poles, Jackson Pollock 1952

- Examples of completed projects

Vocabulary:

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|-------------------------|--|
| Abstract Expressionism: | The first exclusively American art movement; characterized by an attempt to depict universal emotions; sometimes referred to as 'Action Painting'; concentrated on the physical process of painting; looked to the unconscious for universal symbols of meaning. |
| Splatter painting: | A method of applying paint through flicking or splattering using tools such, as brushes, sticks, twigs or straws. |
| Poured painting: | A method of applying paint through the act of pouring. |
| Formal balance: | Similar or identical elements are given similar or identical placement on either side of the axis of an artwork. |
| Informal balance: | Dissimilar elements are given dissimilar placement so that an effect of balance is felt. |
| Space: | The illusion of distance or depth between elements in a two-dimensional artwork. |
| Line: | The path of movement in a two-dimensional work; the literal application of line using a variety of thicknesses to affect the "speed" of movement throughout an artwork. |

Time:

This assignment will take approximately three fifty-minute class sessions.

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Materials:

- Gesso coated canvas, 18 x 24 or larger
- Acrylic paints, white, black, yellow, red, blue
- Large house painting brushes
- Smaller brushes
- Straws, twigs or sticks
- Containers for water
- Newspaper or painter's tarp
- Paper towels
- Small bathroom cups
- Painting smocks

Preparation:

- Center area for supplies to be obtained and returned
- Cover the floor with newspaper or tarp to protect from paint splatters
- Pour some paints into small cups to ease in pouring and distribution.

Introduction:

The Abstract Expressionist movement developed in New York following World War II. Artists in this movement were influenced by the Surrealists, especially in their preoccupation with the subconscious as a source of creative meaning. The movement is sometimes referred to as 'Action Painting,' a name that is best exemplified by the work of Jackson Pollock. Jackson Pollock is the artist most often associated with Abstract Expressionism because of his production of paintings that were a literal result of his body movements in the creating of the works. Pollock felt a need to be in his paintings, taking the painting surfaces off the wall or easel and working with them laid out on the floor. Pollock poured and flicked paint directly onto his canvases using commercial paints and sticks, a revolutionary act.

Jackson Pollock's artwork is often underestimated and considered to be works that lack control, but Pollock himself would vehemently disagree: "With experience—it seems to be possible to control the flow of the paint, to a great extent... I deny the accident.

(Reframing Abstract Expressionism, Michael Leja)"

Jackson Pollock is best known for being "in" his paintings during the painting process:

When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. (Abstract Expressionism, David Anfam)

Instruction:

This lesson will feature activities that promote a deeper understanding of the process involved in the making of Pollock's drip paintings, encouraging students to notice their own body movements as they attempt to control the drips, lines, and visual elements within their own artworks.

1. The students will begin by participating in a comparative discussion of Pollock's works, using such elements as line, balance, depth, and movement to compare the paintings. Students may be asked such questions as: *How does the line change throughout the painting? What effect does that have? Does the placement of lines, drips, splatters or colors make a difference in how the work is viewed? Is it*

Instruction (continued):

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Erin Dionne

balanced? In what way? What kind of depth is created? How did Pollock achieve this result? Where does your eye move throughout the composition?

2. Give students time to experiment with the materials. Place a few “test” pieces of canvas on the floor around the tables and allow students to work in groups pouring, splattering, and dripping the paint. Assure them that this is just practice and that they don’t have to worry about the end products, but also emphasize that they should be trying to control the application of the paint and the thickness of the lines through controlled body movements. Possibly, demonstrate how the body moves. Rotate your shoulder, flick your wrist, swivel at your hip, etc. and have the students do the same. Experimentation should be allowed for the remainder of the first day of instruction.
3. On the second day of instruction, move any tables and chairs to the perimeter of the room to make space on the floor for students to lay out their individual canvases. Distribute paint in small cups so that students can begin by pouring paint. Give students large brushes to encourage color mixing on the painting surfaces. Emphasize the use of darker shades as a background for the forthcoming drips and splatters. When the canvases have been covered with poured paint, redistribute more paint, especially lighter colors. Give students smaller brushes, twigs, straws, etc. and allow them to begin dripping and splattering paint using controlled movements. Remind them of the experimentation they did before and how the line thickness can effect the movement in the paintings. Also remind them to consider how they want to balance their compositions.
4. On the third day, students should be able to complete their drips and splatters, paying careful attention to where and how they are applying the paint and what effects they are creating. Encourage students to pause and look at their paintings just as Pollock did so that they may discover what they “have been about.”
5. Have all students walk around the room and initiate a comparative discussion about the elements in their paintings, relating back to the images of Pollock’s works that were discussed on the first day.

Teacher Evaluation:

1. Were students able to find creative expression while maintaining a level of control when working with canvases on the floor rather than at an easel or table?
2. As the lesson progressed, were students able to gain control over the application of paint by paying attention to their own body movements?
3. Did the finished painting demonstrate the students’ abilities to recognize and implement the use of line, balance, depth, and movement?

Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework Standards:

In this lesson, students will work with the following standards:

*Standard 1: Methods Material and Techniques

- 1.1 Use a variety of materials and media.
- 1.2 Create artwork in a variety of two-dimensional and three-dimensional media.

Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework Standards (continued):

THE TOTAL TRAGEDY OF A GIRL NAMED HAMLET

Erin Dionne

- 1.3 Learn and use appropriate vocabulary related to the methods, materials, and techniques.
 - 1.4 Learn to take care of materials and tools and use them safely.
 - 1.5 Expand the repertoire of 2D and 3D processes, techniques, and materials with focus on the range of effects possible within each medium.
 - 1.6 Create artwork that demonstrates an awareness of the range and purpose of tools.
- *Standard 2: Elements and Principles of Design
- 2.2 For line, explore the use of line in 2D and 3D works. Identify a wide variety of lines in the environment and in artwork.
 - 2.6 For space and composition, explore composition by creating artwork with a center of interest, repetition, and/or balance. Demonstrate an understanding of foreground, middle ground, and background. Define and identify occurrences of balance, rhythm, repetition, variety, and emphasis.
 - 2.8 For line, use and be able to identify types of line.
- *Standard 3: Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression
- 3.2 Create 2D and 3D expressive artwork that explore abstraction.
 - 3.6 Create artwork that employs the use of free form symbolic imagery that demonstrates person invention, and/or conveys ideas and emotions.
- *Standard 4: Drafting, Revising, and Exhibiting
- 4.3 As a class, develop and use criteria for informal classroom discussions about art.
 - 4.6 Demonstrate the ability to articulate criteria for artistic work, describe personal style, assess and reflect on work orally and in writing, and to revise work based on criteria developed in the classroom.
- *Standard 5: Critical Response
- 5.1 In the course of making and viewing art, learn ways of discussing it, such as by making a list of all of the images seen in an artwork; and identifying kinds of color, line texture, shapes, and forms in the work.
 - 5.3 Describe similarities and differences in works, and present personal responses to the subject matter, materials, techniques, and use of design elements in artworks.
 - 5.4 Explain strengths and weaknesses in their own work and share comments constructively and supportively within the group.
 - 5.5 Demonstrate the ability to recognize and describe the visual, spatial, and tactile characteristics of their own work and that of others.

Getting Into Painting Lesson Rubric

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| | **Excellent** 20 points | **Good** 15 points | **Fair** 10 points | **Poor** 5 points | *Comments* |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|-------------------|
| Media and Techniques | | | | | |
| Pours and Splatters | Demonstrated an exceptional amount of control in the application of paint. | Demonstrated frequent control in the application of paint. | Demonstrated minimal control in the application of paint. | Demonstrated no control in the application of paint. | |
| Variation of Lines | Lines in the finished painting show careful attention to variety and encourage visual movement in a considered way. | Lines in the finished painting show occasional variety and some consideration is given to their effect on visual movement. | Lines in the finished painting seldom show variety and only minimal consideration is given to their effect on visual movement. | There is no evidence of intentional variety in the finished painting and the visual movement throughout the work is haphazard. | |
| Balance and Depth | Demonstrated clear understanding of the concepts of balance and depth through the placement and layering of elements within the painting. | Demonstrated partial understanding of the concepts of balance and depth through an honest attempt of using these concepts in the process of painting. | Demonstrated only minimal understanding of the concepts of balance and depth and made few attempts to use this understanding in the process of painting. | Demonstrated no understanding of the concepts of balance and depth and any evidence of this understanding in the painting was accidental, not intentional. | |
| “Getting into” the Paintings | Showed enthusiasm and risk-taking in the new approach of painting a large surface area placed on the floor. Varied the physical approach to painting by moving around the work, using whole body movements, and stepping back to assess what was being created. | Showed some enthusiasm and risk-taking in the new approach of painting. Occasionally moved around the work, used whole body movement, and stepped back to assess what was being created. | Showed minimal enthusiasm and risk-taking in the new approach of painting. Seldom moved around the work, used whole body movement, and stepped back to assess what was being created. | Showed no enthusiasm or risk-taking in the new approach of painting. Never moved around the work, used whole body movement, or stepped back to assess what was being created. | |