



## Abstract Art- Wassily Kandinsky

### Summary

Abstract art is a modern form of art where the picture or sculpture produced does not represent images of our everyday world. Instead, the artwork has colours, lines and shapes but the artist is not intending to represent objects or living things. The artist is usually trying to convey some kind of emotion. Although, at first glance, many examples of abstract art appear to be quite random, the artists have planned their work in great detail, with the intention of capturing emotions and thoughts on the canvas or within the sculpture.

Abstract art became particularly popular in the United States of America during the 20th century, although artists across the world became well known for developing this style. The painting shown is called Electric Prisms and was created by Sonia Delaunay, a French artist, in 1914.

Wassily Kandinsky was born in Moscow, Russia in 1866 and, as a child, enjoyed music and learned to play the cello and the piano. Not until he was 30 did Kandinsky decide to go to an art school in Germany and train to become an artist.

He was inspired by colours and painters such as Claude Monet. After experimenting with landscape painting, Kandinsky began to think that shapes and colours alone could be art, without the need for a particular subject. Over the next few years, he became one of the pioneers of abstract art as he developed his ability to express his feelings and music through shapes and colours in his paintings. Kandinsky died in 1944 but his art and essays on art continued to have a huge influence on many artists during the twentieth century.

### Artists & Artisans:

Famous artists known for creating abstract art include:

- Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) Russian painter
- Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) Dutch painter
- Henry Moore (1898–1986) English artist and sculptor
- Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) French painter
- Mark Rothko (1903–70) American painter
- Jackson Pollock (1912–46) American painter

### Vocabulary:

**random:** not following a plan or pattern

**geometrical:** consisting of regular shapes and lines

**outline:** the edge of an object or shape shown with a line

**contrasts:** big differences between two things when you compare them

**transparent:** can be seen through

**chromatic:** having colours physical: to do with the body, how things are touched and seen

**pioneer:** one of the first people to do something

**harmonise:** fit well with each other

**chord:** musical notes played or sung at the same time

**spiritual:** relating to people's thoughts or beliefs, often about religion

**trend:** a fashion or something many people copy

**amplification:** making louder or stronger

**spectrum:** a range of colours

**hues:** shades of colour


**gouache:** painting with opaque watercolours mixed with glue

### Colour Theory:

Abstract artists often used strong colour contrasts to create an impact on the viewer. For example, dark/ light,

### Styles and Periods:

'Colour field painting' started in the USA and became popular as a form of abstract art in the 1950s. Artists who used this

	warm/cool, transparent/opaque and chromatic/grey are all examples of making paintings more exciting with visual contrast.		style tried to paint emotion onto large canvases using solid, geometrical shapes of bright colour, as in this 1967 painting by Frank Stella. There were also artists who painted vibrant shapes but, instead of filling them with solid colours, used many colours to outline them.
<b>Media &amp; Materials:</b>	Kandinsky worked with a wide range of materials and painted on canvas, wood and even glass. He is well known for his choice of vivid colours and used oils, watercolours, gouache, tempera and even mixtures of these media. Explore Children can create work in the style of Wassily Kandinsky  <a href="https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kandinsky-cossacks-n04948/how-paint-kandinsky">https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kandinsky-cossacks-n04948/how-paint-kandinsky</a>	<b>Techniques:</b>	One famous abstract artist was Jackson Pollock who created paintings without using brushstrokes. Instead, he used a technique that involved splashing and dribbling paint onto a large canvas straight from a can. This later became known as 'action painting' and was used to show the emotion of the artist through the physical act of painting.
<b>Emotions:</b>	Kandinsky believed that feelings and music could be expressed through colours and shapes. He thought that certain colours placed together could harmonise like chords on a piano. He was very interested in shapes and used circles, triangles and squares regularly in his creations. He believed that the triangle causes aggressive feelings, the square leads to calm feelings, and the circle gives spiritual feelings.	<b>Process:</b>	Kandinsky wrote essays about the process of creating art and, although he believed making art was about freedom, he believed strongly in the five processes below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express your inner feelings and emotions rather than trying to follow a trend.</li> <li>• Don't paint things – paint in abstract form.</li> <li>• Use colour as a window into the human soul – he believed each colour is linked to a personality or emotion.</li> <li>• Treat art like music – artists should experiment with repetition, scale and colour to create rhythm and amplification.</li> <li>• Be original so that you have a positive impact on society with your artwork.</li> </ul>
<b>Visual Language:</b>	Yellow, Red, Blue (see below), painted in 1925 is typical of Kandinsky's style, consisting of geometric shapes and bright colours. In this painting, he mainly used the colours listed in the title but with a spectrum of complementary secondary hues. The eye is taken on a journey of straight lines, curves and waves, with light and shade used to create visual impact.  	<b>Effects:</b>	N/A

**Key Local Links:**

Explore the work of Cumbrian Abstract Artists and how this area has been used to inspire abstract artists such as Andrew Alan Johnson  
<https://artgallery.co.uk/cumbria-abstract-flying-high>

**Curriculum Links, Prior and future learning:**

This unit of work builds on the previous art topic covered on Impressionism  
This links to the ICT unit repeating shapes.



	Basic	Advancing	Deep
Artists & Artisans	Name at least two American abstract artists. What type of artworks did British artist Henry Moore produce? Who painted Electric Prisms in 1914?	Compare and contrast Henry Moore's abstract sculptures with the realist sculptures created during the Renaissance period. Find evidence of similar abstract features used by American abstract artists.	Investigate the work of a modern-day abstract artist and compare their work with that of some of the first American abstract artists.
Techniques	What technique did Jackson Pollock use instead of brushstrokes? Why do some abstract artists use the technique of action painting? Copy Jackson Pollock's painting technique to create a piece of abstract art.	Explain why action painting is an effective technique for an artist who wants to show emotion in their art.	Why do you think that art critics have very different opinions of the work of artists like Jackson Pollock who used techniques other than brushstrokes?
Styles & Periods	List some of the common features of abstract art. When and where did abstract art become popular? What do abstract artists often paint when using the 'colour field' style?	Explain why an abstract artist is unlikely to paint a real object or living thing. Summarise the key abstract features within Sonia Delaunay's painting Electric Prisms.	Why do you think some people describe abstract art as having been produced in a random way? Justify your answer with specific examples.
Colour Theory	Why do abstract artists often use strong contrasting colours? What is meant by the word 'chromatic'? Give a definition of the term 'transparent'. Name the contrasts to the following terms: dark, cool, transparent, chromatic.	Explain why the colours used by L.S. Lowry would not have been as effective if used to create abstract art. Explore the impact of the use of chromatic and grey contrasts when creating a piece of abstract art.	Always, sometimes, never? Strong contrasting colours are effective for all styles and types of art.



	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Advancing</b>	<b>Deep</b>
<b>Visual Language</b>	<p>What are the main features of Kandinsky's painting Yellow, Red, Blue?</p> <p>What is meant by the term 'spectrum'?</p> <p>Copy Kandinsky's use of yellow, red and blue and different shapes to create an abstract painting</p>	<p>Explain to a friend what is meant by 'complementary secondary hues' and give specific examples.</p>	<p>Present a piece of writing to demonstrate how, when looking at Yellow, Red, Blue, the eye is taken on a journey of straight lines, curves and waves.</p>
<b>Media &amp; Materials</b>	<p>List three materials that Kandinsky preferred to paint onto.</p> <p>Name at least three types of paint that Kandinsky used to create his abstract art.</p> <p>Describe what is different about gouache paint.</p>	<p>Compare and contrast the effect of painting on wood, canvas and glass.</p> <p>Explore the impact of using gouache paint.</p> <p>Experiment with different amounts of glue to create different effects.</p>	<p>Experiment with Megan Coyle's collage style to create a piece of abstract art using shapes and vivid colours as Kandinsky did. Evaluate the finished piece by comparing it to the paintings of Kandinsky.</p>
<b>Emotions</b>	<p>Which three shapes did Kandinsky regularly use to convey emotions?</p> <p>Which shape did Kandinsky use to show anger and aggression?</p> <p>Why did Kandinsky often use square shapes?</p>	<p>Choose a set of different shapes to show different emotions. Explain your choices.</p> <p>Find evidence of how other abstract artists have used shapes to convey emotion.</p>	<p>Do you agree that using shapes to show a range of emotions, as Kandinsky did, is just as effective as showing facial expressions and gestures when drawing and painting people?</p>
<b>Process</b>	<p>What did Kandinsky encourage artists to do instead of following a trend?</p> <p>How did Kandinsky believe artists can treat art like music?</p> <p>Why did Kandinsky think it was important to be original?</p>	<p>Explain what Kandinsky meant when he said that colour should be used as 'a window into the human soul'.</p> <p>Explore ways of sketching and colouring shapes using repetition to create amplification.</p>	<p>Explain and justify how the five processes described in Kandinsky's essays show that he believed that art was about freedom.</p>