
Art Masterpiece - Georgia O'Keefe - *Yellow Cactus Flower*

Keywords:

Scale, color, line, composition and mood

Grade: Third Grade

Activity: Watercolor Flowers



About the Artist

Georgia O'Keefe was born on November 15, 1887, the second of seven children, and grew up on a farm in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. As a child she received art lessons at home, and her abilities were quickly recognized and encouraged by teachers throughout her school years. By the time she graduated from high school in 1905, O'Keefe had determined to make her way as an artist.

In her earlier career, she was part of a group known as the "Steiglitz Circle 291" started by her husband Alfred Stieglitz, a photographer. The circle of artists included painters and photographers attempting to forge an American style. They often exhibited their work in the "291" gallery.

Although O'Keefe's training was completely native (American), you can see some European influence in her compositions and use of bright colors.

Subjects of her paintings included barns, churches, skyscrapers, bleached cow bones, and of course, flowers. She often took objects out of their natural contexts, abstracting them while also adding an almost exotic overtone.

Objective: Students will be directed to observe the shapes and lines that make up the flower.

Discussion

Yellow Cactus Flower was completed in 1929. This painting offers a wonderful opportunity to see a familiar object--a flower--in a different way. Most people think of the daisy version of a flower, a circle with loops around it as petals. It's fun to help students identify how an artist represented a flower so clearly in a different way.

First, notice in the painting, that there are no lines drawn. Instead, lines are creating by different colors painted next to each other. Next, you can talk about the colors. Most people think that shadows are always black. Probably, when O'Keefe looked at a yellow-white flower, the shadows were more of a green color. This can lead to the most important thing to remember, that she was looking very closely at some actual flowers--either real life or a photo.

Other things that students may observe: the petals are very flowing, reminding one of water or cloth blowing in the breeze; there are a limited number of colors; there is a lot of color blending.

Discussion Questions

- What is this painting of? How can you tell?
- Are flowers usually painted like this?
- How is this painting different?
- Why do you think she painted them this way?
- What colors do you see?
- If you saw the real flower, what color would it be?
- How does she use the color green?
- Why did she add the little splashes of pink?
- What does this painting remind you of?

Activity: Painting a Watercolor Flower

Materials:

- Visual-Art Print of *Cactus Flower*
- Watercolor Pencils
- White construction paper
- Large brushes
- Cups/bowls of water

Description:

- After discussing the Art, students are to choose the cactus flower from the art print, the flowers in the vase used for 'still life' (on the bookcase), or a flower you may have brought from home, to reproduce. Be sure to explain that they will be sketching a **Magnified** version of the flower.
- Have students write their names on the back of the paper with pencil first.
- Have students study their pictures, trying to concentrate only on the flower, not the leaves or background.
- They are to look closely at the center of it. This center should be a central part of their sketch.
- They are to sketch the shape of their flower with the Watercolor pencils, making sure to fill the whole paper with their flower. After they sketch the shape, have them **lightly color it in**. You may want to suggest that a portion of the flower should touch each of the four edges of the paper.
- After drawing is complete, paint over the flower using brushes dipped in water.
- They should fill in the lighter shades first, then come back and go over the darker areas next.
- Let pieces dry.
- They may be mounted onto Black Construction paper if desired.
- Attach parent letter to back of Masterpiece (or to Black Mat, if used).