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## Art Masterpiece: *Goldfish*, by Paul Klee

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**Keywords:** Patterns, Background and Color

**Grade(s):** 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>

**Activity:** Watercolor Resist Fish Painting



*“One eye sees, the other feels.” - Paul Klee*

### **About the Artist:**

- Paul Klee (pronounced: Clay) was born in Switzerland in 1879. This is about the same time as the invention of the automobile.
- His parents were musicians. As a boy, he played the violin.
- Klee loved art as well. His grandmother was the person who taught him how to draw and paint.
- When Klee grew a little older, he had to choose between becoming a musician or an artist. In the end he chose to be an artist.
- Klee married a concert pianist. Paul would become a stay at home dad and work on his art.
- Klee’s art is very colorful and fun. He really liked art that was done by children and sometimes he tried to make his art look like it was done by a child.
- Klee worked in many different media—oil paint, watercolor, ink, pastel, etching, and others. He often combined them into one work. *Goldfish* is painted with oil paints and watercolor paints together.

- He also liked to paint more than one painting at a time. He could have up to 12 paintings in his studio, all halfway done. By the end of his career, Klee painted over 8,000 paintings.
- At the height of his career, Paul became a very respected artist and went on to teach art in German Universities.
- In 1933, the German government said his art was “below standards” and locked most of it away in museum cellars. Luckily, many of them were found so we can enjoy them today.

### **About the Work:**

This beautiful goldfish is in deep blue water, with other little red and purple fishes, who seem to be keeping out of the goldfish's way. There are tiny ripples in the water all around and from the lower edge rise some light blue plants. The goldfish looks like it is glowing, and if it actually was, it should light up the water, but the water remains dark. The goldfish glows alone with its improbable color. The goldfish's fins are orange-red, and the red eye heightens the brilliance of the scales.

Is the goldfish swimming or floating quietly? Presumably it is swimming, for the seven other fish seem to be running away from it. The goldfish seems very calm. The placement of the fish divides the blue-black water, which is deepest and darkest at the middle, where there is no trace of vegetation. The goldfish is the center focus of this painting; everything is subordinate to it.

### **Possible Questions:**

1. What do you see in this picture?
2. How many fish do you see?
3. What shapes do you see? Are any of the shapes repeated?
4. What colors are the fish? What other colors do you see? Can you name some of them?
5. What is the background color?
6. Do you see patterns in this painting? What are patterns? (Patterns are repeated lines, shapes, colors or designs) Show me.
7. Does the picture make you smile, or want a goldfish?
8. Does it look like something a child would paint? Something you might paint?

9. What do you think the big fish is doing?
10. What kinds of things do fish do? (live in water, swims and darts, nibbles food (at the surface), floats and rests in the underwater plants)
11. How do you think this painting was made? (Oil paint and watercolor).

**Activity:** Watercolor Resist Fish Painting

**Materials Needed:**

- White construction paper, 9" X 12", - OR – white cardstock, one per student
- Brightly colored crayons or oil pastels, students can share one set between two students
- Blue tempera paint, lightly watered down. (Alternately, black tempera paint, lightly watered down.) Three cups worth, to share
- Disposable or plastic cups, 3 to share
- Wide, flat paintbrushes, about six
- Newspapers to cover table (optional)
- Paper towels

**Preparation:**

On a table in the classroom, set up the watercolor resist supplies (watered-down paint and brushes.) Cover table with newspapers, if you wish. This table will need to be supervised by an adult while the students “wash” their drawings.

**Process:**

1. Tell students that Paul Klee painted this goldfish in the goldfish’s natural environment (its own home.) This environment (where the fish lives) is the background to the painting. Ask the students to think about what their background will look like before they start. What will they draw or paint around the fish? Other fish? Plants? Scuba divers?
2. Pass out papers and crayons/oil pastels. Have the students draw their own version of “Goldfish” using only brightly colored crayons or pastels. Be sure to have them draw the main subject and items in the background like seaweed, bubbles, smaller fish etc. Have them press hard as they color in. Bright colors will work the best.

3. Remind them to sign their name in the bottom corner.
4. When their drawing is complete, have students come to the table that you've set up the paint and brushes on. This part may be done by the student but an adult should be there to assist and supervise.
5. Instruct students to:
  - a. Dip the brush in the diluted paint.
  - b. Starting at the top of the paper, sweep brush from one side of the paper to the other.
  - c. Dip again , slightly overlapping and paint across another row
  - d. Continue to the bottom
6. The crayons/pastels should "resist" the paint, creating a bright contrast like the one Klee has in "Goldfish".
7. Let dry. If the paint is too thick for the pastels to show through, students can carefully dab the wet painting with paper towels

Example:



**Parent Note:**

Paul Klee (1879 – 1940) was a Swiss-German painter. Klee experimented with and eventually deeply explored color theory. His works reflect his dry humor and his sometimes childlike perspective, his personal moods and beliefs, and his musicality.

Today in Art Masterpiece, students experimented with watercolor resist, drawing and painting their own goldfish.



*Goldfish, 1925*

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*Goldfish, 1925*