
Art Masterpiece: *Color Study: Squares with Concentric Rings* (1913)

By Wassily Kandinsky

(pronounced: Va-SEE-lee Kan-din-skee)

Keywords: Abstract, Color Theory:
Warm, Cool and Neutral

Grade: 3rd Grade

Activity: Concentric Circles



"I applied streaks and blobs of colors onto the canvas with a palette knife and I made them sing with all the intensity I could..."

Meet The Artist:

Wassily Kandinsky was born on December 16, 1866, in Moscow, Russia. His father was a tea merchant and his mother was a homemaker. At an early age Wassily exhibited a very special gift called synaesthesia cognate. This gift gave him the ability to hear music when he saw colors & see colors when he heard sounds. This special gift was encouraged by his parents who enrolled him in private drawing lessons as well as lessons in piano and cello.

Kandinsky went to college and became a law professor. However, when he was thirty he decided to change careers and become an artist. He attended art school at Munich, Germany and it was here he quickly became very knowledgeable in art and the **color theory**. He was influenced by painters such as Claude Monet and Georges Seurat, as well as famous composers and philosophers. Around 1909 Kandinsky began to think that painting didn't need a particular subject, but that shapes and colors alone could be art. Over the next several years he would start to paint what would become known as Abstract Expressionism. The main characteristic of **abstract** art is that it has no recognizable subject and has theories on how emotions can be influenced by certain colors and shapes. Kandinsky was one of the founding fathers of Abstract Art, and became a leader among other well known artists of the time.

Throughout his art career, he continually developed his style towards more geometrical shapes and his use of color always remained true. The piece you are observing today was done as a color study. He believed all colors and forms had a deep meaning and carefully planned each painting to express the feelings he wanted to convey.

Ⓢ **Color Theory:** Use the color wheel and write the color information (written below) on the board

- Primary colors: Red, Yellow and Blue. All other colors can be made from mixing these three colors.
- Secondary colors: Equal amounts of two primary colors
 - Yellow + Red = Orange
 - Blue + Yellow = Green
 - Red + Blue = Purple
- Complimentary colors: Colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel
 - Show color wheel - Red and green --- blue and orange --- violet and yellow
- **Neutral colors:** Not associated with a color: browns, blacks, grays and whites:
 - Can be used to change value of a color
 - Red + white = pink
- **Warm colors:** red, orange, yellow; artist use warm colors to demonstrate: happiness, energy, coziness, and comfort. They attract the eye. Red is the hottest
- **Cool colors:** blue, green and violet: are used to show: calm, trust, sadness and/or melancholy

Possible Questions:

- Ⓢ What do you see in this painting?
- Ⓢ Discuss if/how colors make them feel?
- Ⓢ If you could hear the colors in this painting, what would they sound like?
- Ⓢ Do you think having Synaesthesia helped him in selecting colors?
- Ⓢ What shapes do you see the most?
- Ⓢ Are these shapes "perfect"?
- Ⓢ What does a circle represent to you? (Kandinsky believed that the circle is the most peaceful shape and represents the human spirit).
- Ⓢ Looking at the print -- Can you find the square that has all warm colors?
 - Cool colors?
 - Neutral colors?
 - A square where the red has less intensity?

Activity: Color Study: Watercolor Concentric Circles

****Note to Art Guide:** Since the children are working with paint, an art shirt is recommended. A couple of weeks prior to the lesson, make copies of the "messy art day" sheet and put that in the teacher's mailbox to be sent home with the children.

Materials Needed:

- ⓐ 9"x12" watercolor or cardstock paper (folded into six squares)
- ⓐ Liquid watercolors (use sparingly, a little goes a long way! Please do not pour unused watercolor back in container, this has caused our stock to be ruined & thrown away 😞)
- ⓐ Medium sized paintbrushes
- ⓐ Newspapers to cover tables
- ⓐ 3 oz. plastic cups

Process:

- ⓐ Cover desks with newspaper
- ⓐ Hand out supplies, paper, pencil and brushes only
- ⓐ Label back of each paper with name/teacher
- ⓐ Have the students lay the paper in front of them like a place mat. Fold the paper into **three** sections each measuring 4". Next, open the paper and with the 9" side toward them, have them fold the paper in half from right to left. Unfold paper so there are six squares.
- ⓐ Hand out cups with $\frac{1}{2}$ " of watercolor inside (remember, a little goes a long way!)
- ⓐ Tell the students they are going to use the watercolors to create their own concentric circles inside each of these squares and similar to the one they studied today by Kandinsky. Since this is abstract art, there should not be smiley faces or recognizable symbols

To begin color: Have students choose one of the squares to begin. They will paint a large circle to the edges of the square and continue to paint smaller and smaller colored circles according to the procedure below. Expect the paint to run, which makes for a beautiful end result. Write these directions on the board as they move to the next square as a class. They should not work ahead....this is a lesson on listening as well!

- A. 1 square must use all warm colors.
- B. 1 square must have all cool colors
- C. 1 square must have all neutral colors
- D. 1 square must have a warm and cool color together
- E. The last 2 squares are their choice