

Mark-Making with Joan Mitchell

Grade

● 4–8

Teacher-In-Residence

● Gina Studebaker

Subjects

● Art, Social-Emotional
Learning

Carnegie
Museum of Art

Goals

- Recognize that all arts have artists that explore and master their chosen medium and use it for expression.
- Understand and be able to apply media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.
- Explore a variety of mediums.
- Create a classroom gallery for display and reflection.

Objectives

- Students will identify and analyze the artwork *Sans Neige* by Joan Mitchell and *Water Lilies (Nymphéas)* by Claude Monet.
- Students will answer questions and discuss Mitchell's work with classmates and teacher by responding to prompts that encourage higher level thinking routines.
- Students will examine Mitchell's abstract marks and imitate the gestures used to create the marks.
- Students will explore how the gestures of a mark convey feelings and ideas.

National Core Visual Arts Standards Grades 4–8

- **Anchor Standard 1** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- **Anchor Standard 2** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- **Anchor Standard 6** Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- **Anchor Standard 7** Perceive and analyze artistic work for presentation.
- **Anchor Standard 10** Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art.
- **Anchor Standard 11** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Materials

Day 1:

- See/Wonder/Connect Handout
- Joan Mitchell slideshow presentation
- Pencils
- Color copies of Mitchell and Monet artworks
- Photos of each artist
- Painter's tape (optional)

Day 2:

- Elements of Art (Lines) handout from any website or hand drawn lines styles on a dry erase board
- Heavy weight paper
- Various mediums (crayons, oil pastels, paints)
- Music of choice, list of words, or photos. (See Extensions, Modifications and Supporting Information section.)

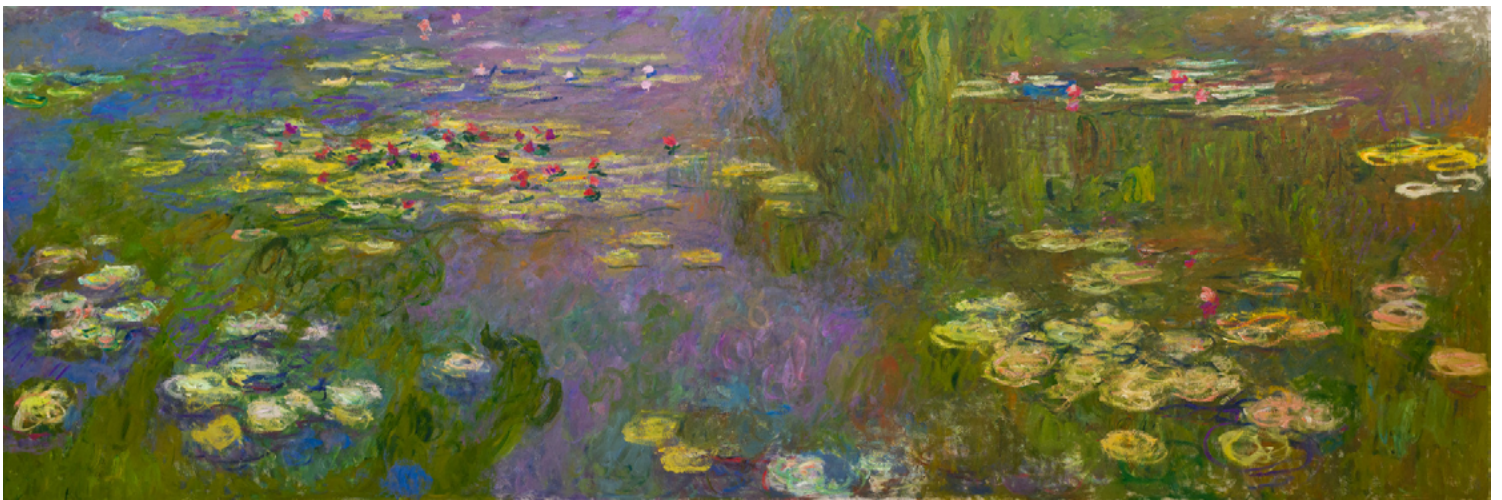
Vocabulary

- Abstract
- Abstract Expressionism
- Impressionism
- Landscape
- Triptych
- Gestures
- Complimentary colors
- Lines
- Texture
- Value
- Balance
- Movement
- Gesture
- *Sans* – Without
- *Neige* – Snow
- *Nymphéas* – Water Lilies
- *En plein air* – in the open air

Artworks



Joan Mitchell, *Sans Neige (Triptych)*, 1969, Purchased with funds provided by the Hillman Foundation, 70.46.4.A-C © Estate of Joan Mitchell



Claude Monet, *Water Lilies (Nymphéas)*, ca. 1915–1926, Acquired through the generosity of Mrs. Alan M. Scaife, 62.19.1

Lesson

Duration: Two 35-minute class periods.

DAY 1: Introductory Lesson—Get to Know Joan Mitchell

This introductory lesson may be used in conjunction with the Joan Mitchell slideshow.

(Slides 2–3) Introduce the artwork by Joan Mitchell. Encourage students to look over the artwork for a few minutes, without knowing the title, and record what they “See.” Ask: If the students were to step inside of this painting, what things would they see? Guide the students to record three or more descriptive words on sticky notes or a handout. They may identify elements of art that they recognize. Next, ask the students to look away, and then look again at the artwork and record two additional words to describe it. Ask students to share their observations with the large group. (A word cloud may also be used for this process).

(Slides 4–5) Students will then be guided to “Wonder” about the artwork. Teacher will model question starters to encourage interesting questions. Students will record two or more questions about the artwork

on the handout and select a favorite to share with a classmate and, if time allows, the large group.

(Slides 6–12) Learn About the Artist Joan Mitchell. Teacher will narrate the following information about the artist Joan Mitchell in conjunction with the slideshow. This general information can be found on the Joan Mitchell Foundation website.

“My painting is not like a story... it is more like a poem.” –Joan Mitchell
Joan Mitchell (1925–1992) was a visual artist known for her paintings, drawings, and prints. She grew up in Chicago, where she studied art. As a youth, she was very competitive in figure skating and enjoyed poetry, dogs, and the outdoors. She traveled back and forth from New York to Paris for several years and eventually purchased land in France that neighbored the former home of famous Impressionist artist Claude Monet (1840–1926).

(Slide 13) Read the following information as the students look again at the artwork. Mitchell made abstract art, which is art that does not show recognizable objects, while sometimes listening

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to music. *Sans Neige (Triptych)* is her first large scale painting of a panoramic landscape. “I carry my landscape around with me,” Mitchell once said. “I live in it, I walk in it. It’s fabulous. The garden, the trees, the church...” She loved nature and saw it through her art—“I frame everything that happens...it is a photograph in my mind.”

(Slide 14) Teacher will introduce works of the Abstract Expressionist. Ask the students to describe what they “See” in these paintings. Photos have links to the Carnegie Museum of Art collection.

(Slide 15) Teacher will provide more information about Joan Mitchell’s colleagues:

In the 1950s, Mitchell was a part of a group of painters called Abstract Expressionists. They were called this because they used abstract art to express their emotions. Instead of showing the world how it really appears, they would use lines, color, and texture to show feelings and moods.

Common techniques from the Abstract Expressionist artists include the following:

- Obvious brushstrokes, drips, and

splatters from the artist

- Marks that show how the artist moved the brush, known as gestures
- Artworks that are unrecognizable but express feelings and emotions through color, lines, and texture

(Slide 16) Students may tour the space where the *Sans Neige (Triptych)* is displayed in the Carnegie Museum of Art by clicking on the largest museum building picture.

(Slides 17–18) Connect the artwork with Claude Monet’s *Water Lilies (Nymphéas)*. Teacher will offer brief information on Monet.

- Impressionist Artist
- Liked to work outside (en plein air)
- Studied light and how it changes the color of objects throughout the day
- Made paintings on a grand scale

(Slide 19) Final Reflection *How are the works similar and different? Why did the teacher choose the Monet artwork to compare and contrast?* Students will use a few minutes to record or discuss three to five things that they notice and will discuss with the large group. Teacher will ask students what new ideas they now

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have about the artwork.

DAY 2: Main Activity—Mark Making Art

Before the lesson, supply tables with art paper and various mediums to explore. (Optional: Use painter's tape to mark off the size of the Sans Neige (Triptych) somewhere in the classroom to reference its size.)

Transition: Students will recall previous Joan Mitchell lesson. Review with slideshow.

Students can review types of lines with a line handout. Teacher will read miscellaneous words, show photos, or play (timed) music pieces* and ask students to interpret the item with their own abstract marking. Encourage students to use a variety of colors and mediums, such as crayons, oil pastels, or paints, and to be aware of their space in relationships with other classmates. This activity can be completed as collaborative work or individually.

Remind students to draw unrecognizable shapes and to use abstract marks when creating. Students are encouraged to stand back and look at their work to determine when their piece is

finished.

Finally, students will take a gallery walk to observe classmates' artwork.

*See Lesson Extensions, Modifications, and Supporting Information for more details.

Questions for written response or oral discussion:

- Students can compare their work to Joan Mitchell. How is it similar, how is it different?
- What words, photos, or parts of the music do they recognize in their artwork?
- How did they know their work was done?

Assessment

Students will be assessed by using the attached forms. A rubric for the artwork and/or a self-assessment for the activity may be used.

Abstract Expressionism Art Rubric

Self-Assessment/Abstract Expressionism

Lesson Extensions and Modifications

Music

- Students will be introduced to the science of synesthesia and how music can be used as a medium to create art. Joan Mitchell and Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky were synesthetes.
- Students will work together to create music based on the Mitchell or the Monet artwork. If the painting were a piece of music, how would it sound?
- Genre or time period music can be used in the mark-making activity. This could also extend to Social Studies in studying a particular time period.
- Students could listen to selected music and match it with an abstract artwork. Students would write about why they chose the artwork to match the music.

Language Arts

- Write a story or a conversation between the two artists. What would they say to each other? This lesson could practice the four sentence types.
- Students will identify nouns and adjectives to describe the artwork and then create a diamante poem.

Exploring Movement

- Students will act out movements that they may feel in each part of the triptych. Does it or can it tell a story?

Supporting Information

For the first part of the mark-making activity, the teacher may choose from the following approaches to stir creativity.

For miscellaneous words, the teacher will make a list of words and place them on index cards. They could be words that may create feelings or cause the students to think of a color. The following adjectives are examples: athletic, happy, stormy, peaceful, etc. As the teacher reads these words, students will express these feelings or colors through gestures on their artwork.

A poem that is being studied in class could also be read by the teacher, or it could be one that the student chooses. Explain how Joan Mitchell's strong gestures displayed in her artworks reflect her love of poetry and language.

For photos, the teacher will provide photographs of landscapes, flowers, animals, nature, vacation areas, or seasons to the students. The students will choose one, study it for a few minutes, and then turn it over or. Then the students will create an abstract picture from memory of the photograph. Explain

how this connects to Joan Mitchell's photographic memory.

For the music choice, the teacher will choose music from a particular genre or time period. The teacher will play music for a certain amount of time as the students create gestures. Explain that Joan Mitchell enjoyed listening to music while she was painting.