

BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS*Pablo Picasso – The Three Musicians*

Pablo Ruiz Picasso (b. 1881, d. 1973) is probably the most important figure in 20th Century art. Time magazine art critic Robert Hughes once said that "To say that Pablo Picasso dominated Western art in the 20th century is, by now, the merest commonplace. Before his 50th birthday, the little Spaniard from Malaga had become the very prototype of the modern artist as public figure. No painter before him had had a mass audience in his own lifetime."

He was born October 25, 1881 in Malaga, Spain and by the time he died in France in April of 1973, had created a staggering 22,000 works of art in a variety of mediums, including sculpture, ceramics, mosaics, stage design and graphic arts. As critic Hughes notes, "There was scarcely a 20th century movement that he didn't inspire, contribute to or--in the case of Cubism, which, in one of art history's great collaborations, he co-invented with Georges Braque--beget."

A precocious draftsman, Picasso was admitted to the advanced classes at the Royal Academy of Art in Barcelona at 15. After 1900 he spent much time in Paris, remaining there from 1904 to 1947, when he moved to the South of France. His power is revealed in his very early works, some of which were influenced by Toulouse-Lautrec.

Picasso's artistic production is usually described in terms of a series of overlapping periods. In his "Blue Period" 1901-4 he depicted the world of the poor. Predominantly in tones of blue, these melancholy paintings are among the most popular art works of the century. Canvases from Picasso's "Rose Period" 1905-06 are characterized by a lighter palette and greater lyricism, with subject matter often drawn from circus life. Picasso's Parisian studio attracted the major figures of the avant-garde, including Matisse, Braque, Apollinaire, and Gertrude Stein.

In 1907 Picasso painted *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, a radical departure from the artistic ideas of the preceding ages and now considered the most significant work in the development toward cubism and modern abstraction. The influence of Cézanne and of African sculpture is apparent in its fragmented forms and unprecedented distortions. The painting heralded the first phase of cubism, called analytic cubism. This severe, intellectual style was conceived and developed by Picasso, Braque, and Gris c.1909-12.

In the synthetic phase of cubism (after 1912) his forms became larger and more representational, and flat, bright decorative patterns replaced the earlier, more austere compositions. *The Three Musicians* exemplifies this style. Picasso's cubist works established firmly that the work of art may exist as a significant object beyond any attempt to represent reality. During both periods of cubism experiments by Picasso and others resulted in several new techniques, including collage and papier collé.

The artist sought to strengthen the emotional impact of his work and became preoccupied with the delineation of agony. In 1937 the bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica impelled him to produce his second landmark painting, *Guernica*, an impassioned allegorical condemnation of fascism and war. The profits Picasso earned from a series of etchings and prints on the *Guernica* theme made in the 1930s went to help the Republican cause.

In his later years Picasso turned to creations of fantasy and comic invention. He worked consistently in sculpture, ceramics, and in the graphic arts, producing thousands of superb drawings, illustrations, and stage designs. By virtue of his vast energies and overwhelming power of invention Picasso remains outstanding among the masters of the ages.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pablo Picasso – The Three Musicians

The Three Musicians was painted by Picasso in 1921. In fact, *The Three Musicians* is the name of two very similar paintings made that year. These paintings each feature a harlequin (jester-like character) with a guitar, a pierrot (a mime) playing a clarinet and a signing monk with sheet music. The harlequin represents Picasso himself; the pierrot represents French poet and novelist Guillaume Apollinaire; and the monk represents French writer Max Jacob. The painting's jigsaw-like composition is a perfect example of the Cubist movement of the time.

1. Study this picture for a minute or two. What do you think of it?
What was the first thing that attracted your attention?
What is happening in this painting?
2. What is the character of each of the three musicians?
Can you tell something about them from the clothes they wear?
3. How do shapes work together to form one personage, for example.
Are there certain basic shapes or combinations of shapes?
4. Do you see a number of colors? Variations of the same color?
Are the colors primary? Secondary? Combinations?
Do the colors have an emotional quality?
5. Do you see lines in the painting? Are they straight? Curved?
How do those lines help our eyes move around the painting?
6. Are there different textures? How many different kinds?
How does texture add interest to this work?
7. What type of movement is shown in this painting?
Can line quality contribute to a feeling of movement?
Do the lines and blocks of shape contribute to movement in this painting?
8. How does this painting make you feel when you look at it?
After having discussed it, do you understand it better?
How is your reaction to it changed from when you first saw it?
Would you like to have it in your house?

SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Pablo Picasso – The Three Musicians

1. Three Picasso Styles

Materials: paper divided into three sections, pencils

Have students draw themselves first as lifelike as possible

Next, students draw themselves in cubism style

Last, draw in “Picasso” style

2. Shaping up with Picasso

Materials: white paper, pastels or crayons, watercolors, newspapers

- Arrange a simple still life on a table with objects that interest the age group. Provide time for student groups to view and discuss the still life. What aspects of Picasso's style do they see in the still life?
- Students investigate geometric shapes in the still life.
- Students draw these geometric shapes, using a different color for each shape. Complex forms, such as a teddy bear, will have several geometric shapes, each in a different color of pastel or crayon.
- Students cover their work area with recycled newspaper. Wet one completed object with a paint brush and clear water. Then fill a brush with one color of watercolor and paint the wet surface. The wash will unify the individual geometric shapes into a recognizable whole.
- The remaining objects can be filled with a wash of watercolor.

3. Picasso Jigsaw

Materials: Color copy of a Picasso painting – one with a lot of detail and color

Divide the copy into squares, cut it into squares, and number each piece on the back. Each child copies his small square onto a larger square painting. When all are complete, assemble the giant painting together, referring to the numbered grid and copy of the painting.