

BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS*Jackson Pollack - Mural*

Jackson Pollock was one of the most controversial artists of the 20th century. There are people who think that he painted some of our country's greatest art, while others think that he painted art which is nonsense. Whatever is said about him, one fact remains, he helped to start a whole new movement in painting, and he influenced thousands of artists.

The kind of art that Jackson Pollock helped develop is called ***abstract expressionism***. This is a type of modern art, which permits the artist to express his feelings and impressions in a very personal, unrealistic fashion. People who have taken time to understand this form of art find it to be most enjoyable and stimulating. When looking at an abstract expressionist painting, do not expect to see what the title suggests. The key to understanding this kind of art is within each of us, and we must use it in a personal fashion. No two persons respond to, interpret, or enjoy pictures in the same way. For some, the color of the painting will be enjoyable; for others, there may be shapes, which remind them of past experiences, or things which they have seen. No one can tell us how to enjoy works of art.

Jackson Pollock was born in 1912. He spent his boyhood with his family on farms in Arizona and California. He was the youngest of five sons. He studied sculpture and painting in high school. In 1929, when he was 17, he hitchhiked his way across the United States to New York to study at the Art Students' League, with the great American artist, Thomas Benton. At one time he supported himself by working as a museum handyman.

He tried many different kinds of painting but none seemed to suit his needs of expression. In the 1930's he started to paint in a way which had not been used before. He abandoned the slow method of painting with a brush and began to dribble and pour paint on the canvas. Sometimes he dipped sticks into the paint cans and allowed the paint to run off the end onto the canvas which lay on the floor. Other times he poured the paint directly from the cans to the canvas. Sometimes he crawled on the canvas or stood around the sides and reached over it to pour his paint. He said, "I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since I can walk around it, work from four sides, and literally be in the painting." This attitude that the working artist is in the painting is generally considered characteristic of abstract expressionism. If you like at his work, perhaps you can tell the areas where he poured, dribbled, or painted with a brush.

Success came slowly but surely. Gradually people became interested in his work, and by the 1950's he was recognized as one of America's great artists. He became one of the most talked about painters in the world. After 1951 he painted less and less until he stopped completely. Instead of painting he thought about his feelings and how he could best depict them in painting.

During 1955 he began to paint again. Just when his new form of expressionism was starting to develop, tragedy struck. Jackson Pollock was killed in an automobile accident. On a dark night his car crashed into a tree on a country road on Long Island. His ideas was a great loss to the world. His style might have developed into an even greater heights and brought enjoyment to more people. But we still have his paintings, which are prized by museums and collectors everywhere. In 2006, one of his Pollack's paintings sold for \$140,000.

Jackson Pollock helped the world to look at painting in a more personal way. He said, "A painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through."

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What do you see?
Did the painter want to depict something from life or was he interested in design?
2. Did he use many or few colors?
Are they intense or subdued? Light or dark?
Do the colors make you feel any way about the painting?
What if the artist had used different colors?
3. How would the original painting feel if you touched it?
How do you think Pollock felt about the paint?
Do you think he liked the feel of it on the surface?
Are there any differences in texture within the painting?
4. Are the lines sharp and clear or fuzzy?
Thick or thin? Dramatic or peaceful?
5. Is there movement in the picture?
Is it dramatic, or quiet and peaceful? Violent and swirling or subdued?
How do you feel about the movement?
What does it make you feel about the painting?
6. Are there any basic shapes in the painting?
Many shapes can be found, but they are all basically unintentional.
7. Is there feeling or depth in the painting?
How is it achieved?
8. Is there a point of view for the viewer? Above, below, straight on?
Ask the students to pretend they are flat on their backs looking up,
on their stomachs looking into something deep, looking straight on.

SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

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1. A Happening

Materials: tempera paint, drawing or construction paper; plastic silverware, sticks, straws, etc.

Have several different colors of tempera paint. If possible, make several different consistencies of each. Set up several painting stations. Have several containers of the same color tempera paint at each station with various objects to drip paint onto the paper. Place paper on trays. Students move to each station adding to their painting at each one.

2. String Painting

Materials: White construction paper, tempera paint, heavy string

Fold the construction paper in half. Dip the string in one color of tempera paint. Squeeze off excess paint by pulling it between finger and thumb. Lay the string in a wavy pattern on one side of the paper. Fold the paper over. Set a book on top. Pull the string out with a swift pull. Open the paper and let it dry. You may repeat the process with another color. Note the interesting patterns you can obtain and the colors you like to use together.

3. Drop and Blow Painting

Materials: Tempera paint, paper, straws.

Put several large drops of one color of tempera paint on the paper. Blow down on it with a straw. The paint will spread out. The paint can be controlled by turning the paper and blowing across in a particular direction. Let dry for a few minutes. Repeat with a second color. The colors will overlap. Repeat a third time if desired.