

SOUND OF ABSTRACTION

by Meagan Brand

PMA CLASSROOM
BEST FOR
Middle School
High School



THEMES

- Sound and Music
- Abstraction
- Emotion and Expression

Lynne Drexler (United States, 1928–1999), *Misting*, 1961, oil on canvas, 68 1/4 x 63 1/4 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Gift of Harry T. Bone, and Barbara and William Manning, 2004.3. © Lynne Drexler Archive. Image courtesy Petegorsky/Gipe Photo

Collaborator note: this lesson was created in collaboration with Meagan Brand and the Portland Museum of Art.

CONTENT AREAS AND STANDARDS MET

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Music

B.B1.9-DP: Explore and evaluate personal benefits of listening to, performing, and creating music, and the role that music plays in developing empathy.

B.B2.6-8.b: Describe and explore how the study of music integrates with other disciplines and professions.

B.B2.9-DAd.b: Evaluate the impact of music on other disciplines and professions.

Visual Art

D.A2.6-8P.a: Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design.

D.A2.9-DP.a: Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan.

D.C1.9-DAc.b: Evaluate the effectiveness of an image to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of various audiences.

D.C2.6-8Ac: Interpret ideas and mood in art by analyzing artmaking approaches, characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media.

D.D1.9-DAc: Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through artmaking.

D.C1.9-Diploma.a-b

D.C2.9-Diploma

D.D2.9-Diploma

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Students will explore the concept of abstraction.
- Students will learn about the connections between music and art.
- Students will learn about ways to express emotions and meaning within artwork.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can music and emotion inspire art?

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

- Responsible Decision-Making
- Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness
- Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school
- Social Awareness
- Taking others' perspectives
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Self-Awareness
- Identifying one's emotions

MATERIALS NEEDED

ANY NOISEMAKERS OR INSTRUMENTS

available (including CDs, phones, or computers to play music, or your own hands and feet!)

OPTIONAL

handmade instruments

PLAIN PAPER

Multiple pieces of plain paper

PENCILS

or other drawing utensils

OPTIONAL

paint, markers, colored pencils, crayons, etc.

VISUAL ACCESS TO THE ARTWORK

found on PMA's website

INSTRUCTIONS

LOOK

What do you see when you look at the painting?

What sounds might you hear when you look at this painting?

What images might come to mind?

RESPOND

Think about and respond to these questions:

If the artist was listening to music when making this piece, what type of music do you think she was listening to?

How might this painting relate to or be inspired by nature?

What emotions do you feel when you look at this painting?

Write down your responses, share them with someone in your house, or discuss.



LEARN

Use this section to learn more about the subject and context of this artwork.

LYNNE DREXLER (1928–1999) was an abstract painter from Newport News, Virginia, who also had ties to New York City and Maine. Abstract artwork like hers uses expressive lines, shapes, and colors to create an image that is non-representational (doesn't depict a realistic person, place, or scene).

MUSIC ART ABSTRACTION NEW YORK MAINE

WHILE IN NEW YORK CITY, SHE WOULD OFTEN ATTEND CLASSICAL MUSIC PERFORMANCES AND WORK ON SKETCHES WHILE LISTENING.

Many of these sketches went back to her studio and became the inspiration for her paintings. Her favorite classical music composers included Richard Wagner, Gustav Mahler, and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Drexler's many sketches from classical music were never literal depictions of the performers themselves, but were Drexler's expression of how the sounds of the music impacted her. This influence of music on Drexler's work most likely stemmed from the musical education she received from a young age, as well as from her mentor Hans Hoffman's ideas that colors have scales in the same way that music has scales.

GROWING UP, DREXLER LOVED MUSIC AND ART, TWO INTERESTS THAT WOULD STICK WITH HER FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE.

In 1956, she moved to New York City to study art under famous Abstract Expressionist painters of the time such as Hans Hoffman and Robert Motherwell. Abstract Expressionism was an artistic movement most popular from the 1940s to the 1960s in which artists created work through marks and shapes that expressed their emotions rather than a recognizable place, object, or person. It was through these influences that Drexler became interested in abstract painting and the ways that shapes and colors can overlap to guide a viewer's eyes through an image.

IN 1986, DREXLER MOVED TO MAINE'S MONHEGAN ISLAND TO FOCUS ON HERSELF AND HER ARTWORK

—in New York City, her work had not been receiving the critical and commercial praise that she sought because her form of Abstract Expressionism was being replaced by other trends. While in Maine, she became inspired by the natural landscape around her, developing a mature style that strikes a delicate balance between music, nature, art, and abstraction. *Misting*, for example, invites many possible interpretations involving sound and imagery, and each viewer may see something different in it.

ACT

MAKE SOUNDS WHILE LOOKING AT THE ARTWORK.

- A. Gather sound-making materials such as an instrument, a noisemaker, a homemade instrument, or your hands and feet.**
- B. Look at the artwork.**
What emotions are you feeling?
What are you thinking about while looking at the artwork?
- C. Make sounds or music while looking at the artwork.**
Try not to be self-conscious: there's no right or wrong answer here. Just make any sounds that come to mind.
- D. Discuss.**
Discuss why you made the sounds you did. Remember to relate them to the painting. What is it about the painting's shapes or colors that inspired your sound-making?

MAKE ART INSPIRED BY MUSIC

- A. Now you can be an artist who is inspired by music.**
- B. Have someone play a sound or music clip for you.** It can be anywhere from one to five minutes long.
- C. While the music is playing, close your eyes or unfocus your gaze and start to draw.** Incorporate elements of line, color, or shape however you want. Try to really listen to the music and draw what the music inspires in you.
- D. After the song or music clip ends, grab a new sheet of paper.**
- E. Have someone play a different sound or music clip for you.**
- F. Repeat the process, making drawings inspired by the emotions that the music makes you feel.**

REFLECT AND SHARE

Let's reflect on what we just did and the experience we just had while engaging with this artwork.

HOW was this activity? Was it easy or difficult for you? Why?

HOW did your drawings change when different types of music were played?

HOW do you think art and music can be used to express your emotions?

RESOURCES

<https://downeast.com/arts-leisure/lynne-drexler-saw-the-world-through-kaleidoscope-eyes/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vx3IKq8Bg-k>

<https://www.artandantiquesmag.com/symphonies-of-color-2/>

<https://www.farnsworthmuseum.org/exhibition/lynne-drexler-color-notes/>