

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

IDEAS + ACTIVITIES

## SHAPE + MATISSE

### VIEW



**Let us begin with careful looking.** Using our eyes, let's spend one whole minute silently seeing what we notice. Scan the image. What stands out? What are you drawn to? Look for colors, shapes, and lines. What is in the background? The foreground? What objects can you identify? What appears mysterious? Is there anything you notice after looking for one minute that you did not see at first glance?

**Henri Matisse** (French, 1869 - 1954)  
*Dame à la robe blanche (Woman in White)*, 1946

oil on canvas  
35 5/8 × 23 1/4 in.  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent  
Collections; Gift of John and Elizabeth  
Bates Cowles, 1959.40  
© 2021 Succession H. Matisse / Artists  
Rights Society (ARS), New York

Photo Credit: Rich Sanders, Des Moines

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

SHAPE + MATISSE

## DIG

Let's go back to the artwork on page one and try another slow looking practice. Imagine two lines dividing the artwork into four pieces. Look carefully at each piece. List all of the things that you see and notice in the box of where you see it. Now compare your list with a partner or others in a group. Isn't it cool how different people see different things in the same artwork? Take turns building, elaborating, and adding more detail to each other's ideas.

|             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| upper left  | upper right  |
| bottom left | bottom right |

What did you notice about looking at the artwork by focusing on just one part at a time?

Did hearing what other people noticed help you see more? Why or why not?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

## SHAPE + MATISSE

### DISCUSS

After looking closely at the painting, what do you notice? Henri Matisse is the artist who painted this work of art. Matisse is from France and the titles of his works are in French – this work is titled ***Dame à la robe blanche*** or in English, ***Woman in White***. By choosing this title, the artist may have wanted you to particularly notice the color white, but what else do you see?

Artists use all kinds of shapes. What shapes do you see? This painting shows Matisse's fascination with shapes. He selected and arranged shapes to make designs. These designs catch your eye.

Let's talk about hearts. Heart shapes are repeated throughout this painting. Can you find all the hearts? Imagine a full heart shape – find full heart shapes in the painting. Now, imagine half a heart – folded vertically. Can you find a half heart shape in the painting? What about a shape that looks like the top of a heart, with two curves; do you see that shape in the painting? Matisse also used shapes that look like the bottom of a heart, the pointed end, in the painting. Can you find that shape?

What do you notice about the colors that Matisse chose? What do you notice about the woman's posture? Her clothing and jewelry? Her surroundings? Her emotions?

We know the title of this painting is *Woman in White*. If Matisse asked you to name this painting, what would you call it?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

SHAPE + MATISSE

## MATERIALS

Paper  
Scissors  
Glue or Glue Stick

## CREATE

### ASSIGNMENT #1

Ode to a Shape | Visual Arts

Think about shapes and practice cutting free hand.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Almost all the art that we see starts with shapes. Shapes might seem very simple, but they are important, and with them, artists are able to create so much. For this project, think about **one** shape. It could be your favorite shape, your least favorite shape, or any old shape.

Think about all the ways that this shape is special. How is it different from other shapes? Where can you find it in the world? Where can you find it other works of art? What kinds of things can you make from this one shape?

Now that you have thought about it, you will practice cutting this one shape out of paper. Do not draw it first or use a ruler to plan your shape. You will draw the shape with the scissors! Really pay attention to where your scissors are moving. Cut carefully and on purpose. Does it help you to hold the paper still, lay it on a table, or move the paper while cutting?

Think about this as shape practice. Think about how special this one shape is, how important it is. I challenge you to spend 15 minutes cutting this one shape. You might think the very first one is your best, but keep going anyway. Cut big ones little ones; cut from colored paper, special paper, or junk mail. Keep practicing cutting it out until you can cut out the best circle/heart/triangle/whatever you have ever cut out. After 15 minutes, look through your pile of shapes and determine the very best square/star/oval/whatever!

Glue this one great cut out to a piece of paper. You can even give it a frame. Display “the best \_\_\_\_\_” you have ever cut out and be proud of the practice and work that you have done.

## MATERIALS

Paper  
Pencil  
Ruler

### ASSIGNMENT #2

Organic vs. Geometric | Math

Explore the difference between organic and geometric shapes.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Geometric shapes are precise and regular like circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles. Organic shapes may be curving free flowing and look like things found in nature, such as leaves, flowers, and animals. Are you able to find examples of these shapes around you? Your computer, windows, clocks, and toilet paper tubes are often geometric shapes. While plants, clouds, and food in your kitchen will all be organic shapes. Find at least three geometric and three organic shapes around you.

Draw a grid on your paper with six boxes. You will write what you notice about each shape you found in these six boxes. You will put the three geometric shapes in the top boxes and the three organic shapes in the bottom three boxes. You can draw a small picture of the object or write the word.

In the same box as each shape, you will write notes about what you observe about the shapes. Do your organic shapes have any perfectly straight lines? Do any of your geometric shapes have wavy lines? Look closely and decide what kinds of lines you see, then write about the lines and edges. How many corners do the shapes have? What words would you use to describe the shape? Does the shape have a point? Is the shape rounded? Would you say the shape is big or small?

Write at least three notes about each of your six shapes. When you are done, compare them. Do any of your organic shapes have anything in common with your geometric shapes? Are your three geometric shapes alike or different from one another? Did you notice anything about shapes that you had never noticed before? Does your piece of paper feel like art? Or does it feel like math and science? Would you display your paper now? Why or why not?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

## SHAPE + MATISSE

### RELATE

View this [work of art](#). As you look closely, think about this question: *Can you draw with scissors?* Toward the end of his life, Matisse developed a new form of artmaking, the paper cut-out. Matisse was sick, bed ridden, and unable to paint. Because his movements were so limited, he began to cut into painted paper with scissors to create interesting shapes and designs. Matisse called his process *drawing with scissors*.

Look at [this print](#) and notice all the different ways Matisse cut out paper. Matisse explored mixing geometric and organic shapes.

- Geometric shapes are precise and regular – circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles. Geometric shapes are often symmetrical.
- Organic shapes may be curving and free flowing and look like things found in nature, such as leaves, flowers, and animals.

What shapes do you see in Matisse's composition? Notice the large purple shape and the smaller black and yellow shapes. Which shapes are geometric? Which are organic?

When viewing art, shapes might mean different things to different people. Do these cut-outs represent something you recognize? If yes, describe the shapes you recognize.

Are you curious about what Henri Matisse looked like? What would it be like to be drawn by the great artist? What did Matisse look like as he painted and used scissors to create amazing cut-outs?

[This brief video](#) shows Matisse drawing a young boy. There is black and white footage of Matisse working on a painting of a model wearing a white dress and sitting in a chair. The image is similar to the *Woman in White* painting in the Des Moines Art Center. Seeing this clip helps you to imagine the artist working on the painting just discussed. The end of the video features color footage of Matisse drawing with scissors as he cuts out colorful shapes, much like the ones you see in the painting and the print *The Horse, the Circus Rider and the Clown*. The narration is in French, but you do not need to understand the audio to enjoy the video.

Matisse once said. **“Instead of drawing an outline and filling in the color...I am drawing directly in color.”** What does this mean? Think about how you create a picture using color. What processes do you use? Will you try “drawing directly in color” or “drawing with scissors”? What will you need? How will you start?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

SHAPE + MATISSE

## WONDER

Now that you have spent time viewing and thinking about Henri Matisse's painting *Woman in White*, what do you still wonder about this work? If you could ask the artist or the painting anything, what would you want to know most? Use the question starters below to write three questions.

|           |                       |                 |           |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Why is... | I am curious about... | What part....   | Are we... |
| Who is... | How did you...        | What if...      | Is she... |
| Where...  | Did you know...       | Suppose that... | Do you... |

My questions about Henri Matisse's *Woman in White*:

1.

2.

3.