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## Masterpiece: *Color Study: Squares with Concentric Rings*, 1913 by Wassily Kandinsky

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**Pronounced:** Va-SEE-lee Kan-din-skee

**Keywords:** Abstract, Color Theory:  
Warm, Cool and Neutral

**Grade:** 3rd Grade

**Activity:** Concentric Circles



**“I applied streaks and blobs of colours onto the canvas with a palette knife and I made them sing with all the intensity I could...”**

### Meet The Artist:

- Wassily Kandinsky was born in Moscow, Russia in 1866. He grew up in a wealthy, educated family and learned to play the piano and cello as well as drawing and writing poetry. He was very influenced by music and many of his famous paintings have names that relate to music; “Improvisations,” “Impressions”, and “Compositions”.
- In college he studied law and economics; after graduating he began a teaching career as a law professor in a Moscow University.
- When he was 29, he saw an exhibition of French Impressionism with paintings by Claude Monet. At first, Kandinsky did not like the way Monet used large amounts of paint and unrecognizable shapes. He felt that paintings should be real and easy for the observer to understand. Nevertheless, the paintings had a powerful impact that would affect the rest of his life.
- At age 30, he moved to Germany and enrolled in Art School. Here he quickly became very knowledgeable in art and color theory and a leader among other well known artists of the time.

- His early paintings after school were mainly landscapes and towns; using broad brushes of color and recognizable forms (see 'Couple Riding') however throughout his art career, he continually developed his style towards more geometrical shapes; his use of color always remained true. The piece you are looking at today was done as a color study.
- Kandinsky is credited with painting the first modern abstract painting – at the age of 44.
- He believed all colors and forms had a deep meaning and carefully planned each painting to express the feelings he wanted to communicate. He did not feel the need to put recognizable objects in his work.
- He had a neurological phenomenon called synaesthesia, which for Kandinsky meant that he could hear colors as well as see them.
- Kandinsky retired in Paris, France and died in 1944 at the age of 78.

### Discussion:

What is **Abstract Art**? Abstract art and paintings focus on geometric shapes, color and line instead of representing natural or recognizable shapes as their subject.

**Color Theory:** Use the color wheel and write the color information written below on the board.

- Primary colors: Red, Yellow and Blue. All other colors can be made from mixing these three colors.
- Secondary colors: Equal amounts of two primary colors.  
Yellow + Red = Orange, Blue + Yellow = Green Red + Blue = Purple.
- Complimentary colors: Colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel.  
Show color wheel.  
Red and green --- blue and orange --- violet and yellow
- Neutral colors: Not associated with a color-browns, blacks, grays and whites-  
They can be used to change value of a color. Example: Red + white = pink

How do colors make you feel? **Warm colors** are: red, orange, yellow-artist use warm colors to demonstrate happiness and attract the eye. Red is the hottest.

**Cool colors**: blue, green and violet are used to show moodiness, sadness,

### Possible Questions:

- What do you see in this painting?
- If you could hear the colors in this painting, what would they sound like? i.e. Red, Blue, Yellow, each square, all colors together, etc.
- Do you think having Synaesthesia helped him in selecting colors?
- What shapes do you see the most?

- Are these shapes “perfect”?
- What does a circle represent to you? (Kandinsky believed that the circle is the most peaceful shape and represents the human spirit.) A square?
- Looking at the print -- Can you find the square that has all warm colors? Cool colors? Neutral colors? A square where the red has less intensity?

**Activity: Color Study: Watercolor Concentric Circles**

**Note to Art Coordinator or Guide:** Since the children are working with paint, an art shirt is recommended. A few weeks prior to the lesson, make copies of the art shirt request and put that in the teacher’s mailbox to be sent home with the children.

**Materials Needed:** 9”x12” watercolor paper (folded into six squares), watercolor set, medium sized paintbrushes, newspapers, and cups for water

**Process:**

1. Cover desks with newspaper. Hand out supplies.
2. Label back of each paper with name/teacher tag provided.
3. Have the students lay the paper in front of them like a place mat. Fold the paper into **three** sections each measuring 4”. Next, open the paper and with the 9” side toward them, have them fold the paper in half from right to left. Unfold paper so there are six squares.
4. Tell the students they are going to use the watercolors to create their own concentric circles inside each of these squares and similar to the one they studied today by Kandinsky. Since this is abstract art, there should be not smiley faces or recognizable symbols.

**To begin color:** Have students choose one of the squares to begin. They will paint a large circle to the edges of the square and continue to paint smaller and smaller colored circles according to the procedure below. Expect the paint to run, which makes for a beautiful end result. Write these directions on the board as they move to the next square as a class. They should not work ahead...lesson on listening as well!

- a. 1 square must use all warm colors.
- b. 1 square must have all cool colors
- c. 1 square must have all neutral colors
- d. 1 square must have a warm and cool color mix
- e. The last 2 are their choice

\* Remind students that more water on their brushes will make the paint more transparent and lighter-the less water will make the paint more intense and darker

**Other classroom Suggestions:**

The life and works of Wassily Kandinsky is a lot for a 2nd Grader to take in. You may want to hit on the turning points about him but maybe bring in a couple of books to read about shapes:

- i. *The Shape of Me and Other Stuff* by Dr. Seuss
- ii. *The Shape Game* by Paul Rogers
- iii. *Circles and Squares Everywhere* by Max Grover

## Photograph of Wassily Kandinsky and other Paintings



Couple Riding, 1906



Composition, 1911



Improvisation IV, 1913



Moscow I, 1916



Around the Circle, 1940