
Art Masterpiece: *Three Flags*, Jasper Johns

Keywords: repetition, symbol, line, Pop-Art

Grade(s): 1st- 3rd

Activity: Flag Pop-art Painting



About the Artist:

- Jasper Johns was born in 1930 in Augusta, Georgia, and raised in South Carolina.
- Johns began drawing as a young child, and from the age of five knew he wanted to be an artist. He attended the University of South Carolina at Columbia, where his art teachers urged him to move to New York, which he did in late 1948.
- After serving two years in the army during the Korean War, he returned to New York in 1953.
- Jasper Johns was one of the first painters to use everyday objects and commonplace images in his art. This style of art is called “*Pop Art*,” which stands for Popular Art. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Johns painted canvases that showed bull's-eye targets, American flags, numerals, and letters.
- In 1955 Johns had a dream in which he painted the American flag. That year he destroyed all his old art, and painted his first flag picture.
- Johns was interested in how we see simple symbols like flags and numbers. He sometimes changed the colors and repeated these images in his

paintings to change how these things look, and to make viewers examine them and reconsider their meaning. Jasper Johns' art made people ask the questions "Is this art?" and "What is art? Can a symbol like a number or a flag be art?" His art still makes people ask themselves these questions.

- In 1980 the Whitney Museum of American Art paid \$1 million for *Three Flags*; at that time it was the highest price ever paid for the work of a living artist.
- Since the late 1990s, Johns has been working from a restored barn in Connecticut and pursues a hobby of raising bees.

Possible Questions:

- What is this a painting of?
- What does our American flag mean to you? (It is a symbol of our country. It can mean things like liberty and freedom.)
- Share with students that our flag is how America "signs" her name.
- Students can share reasons they are proud of their country. List on whiteboard.
- Who created the American flag? (Betsy Ross. Congress adopted it as our National Flag in 1777.)
- Do you see repetition in this picture? (The stripes and the stars repeat on each individual flag. The entire flag is repeated three times.)
- Why might the artist have chosen to do a piece of art using the American flag? (a way to show respect, a gift, a way to celebrate our country...)
- Why do schools, businesses, neighbors fly a flag outside their building/home?

Materials:

- Per student – Cardstock template (one of each size)
- Per student – 2 narrow foam paint brushes
- Per student – one q-tip
- Corrugated card board – each student will need 2- 2inch square pieces
- Red, white, and blue tempera paints
- Paper plates, for use as paint palettes
- Liquid Glue

- Scrap paper or newspaper for covering desks.
- Optional: Black construction paper for mounting

This project runs smoothly with extra adult helpers. You can ask a friend, neighbor, or relative to help you with this lesson. If you are teaching it alone, don't hesitate to ask the teacher for help too. You can use the "Extra Help Needed" note (at the end of the lesson) to recruit your additional hands. Ask the teacher to email the note to each student's home; and/or photocopy the note and ask the teacher to send it home with the students.

Prep Ahead of class:

On white cardstock, copy the flag templates in the different three sizes. Each student will need: one full page template 8.5 x11, one half page template 5.5x8.5, and one quarter page template 4.25x5.5".

Cut apart the templates ahead of class.

Cut corrugated cardboard into 2" squares. Each student will need 2 pieces. Copy and cut Parent/Artist Bio letter.

Project Time:

Process-

1. Cover desk with newspaper.
2. Set out one plate of red paint, one white, and one of blue, for every four students or table.
3. Hand out flag templates and parent letter/artist bio and glue stick. Each student should receive one large, medium and small template. Have students glue the parent letter/artist bio onto the back of the large template.
4. Explain that this painting project must be done in a certain order to allow the blue paint to dry in time for the stars to be added to their flag.
5. Demonstrate using classroom Document camera how to paint the blue rectangle in the upper left hand corner of each of their 3 flags. Direct

them to fill the entire rectangle shape with paint. Encourage them not to paint too heavy but just enough to make it a nice solid blue. We need this area to dry quickly.

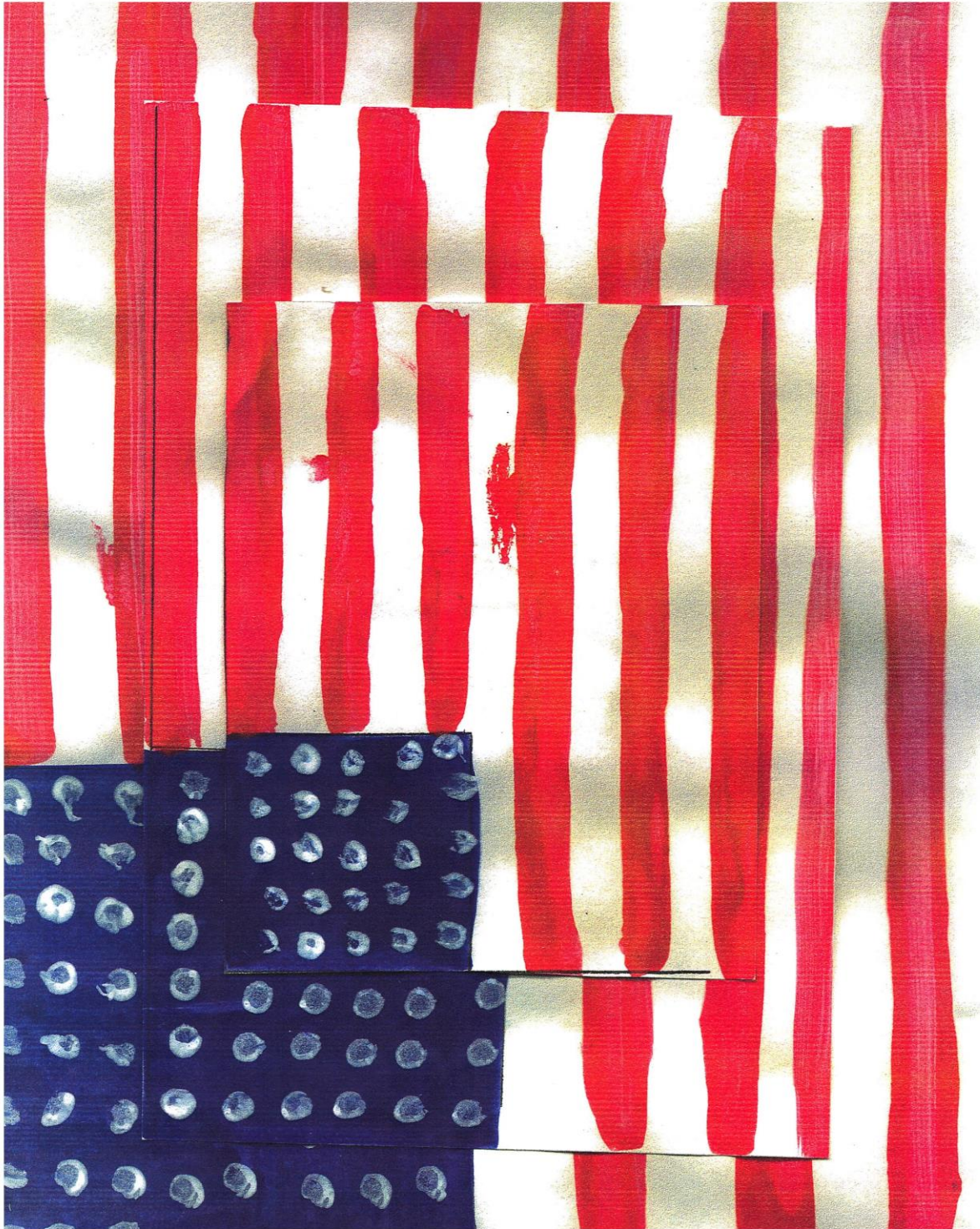
6. Next, have them paint red horizontal stripes across each of the three flags. They will see that the paper showing between the red strips will form the white stripe automatically. They will NOT paint white stripes.
7. When all red stripes are painted, they may take their q-tip and dip it into the white paint and add dots on their blue rectangles to represent the stars. The blue paint should be sufficiently dry enough provided the student uses a gentle dabbing technique when adding the dots.

Layering/Stacking the flags:

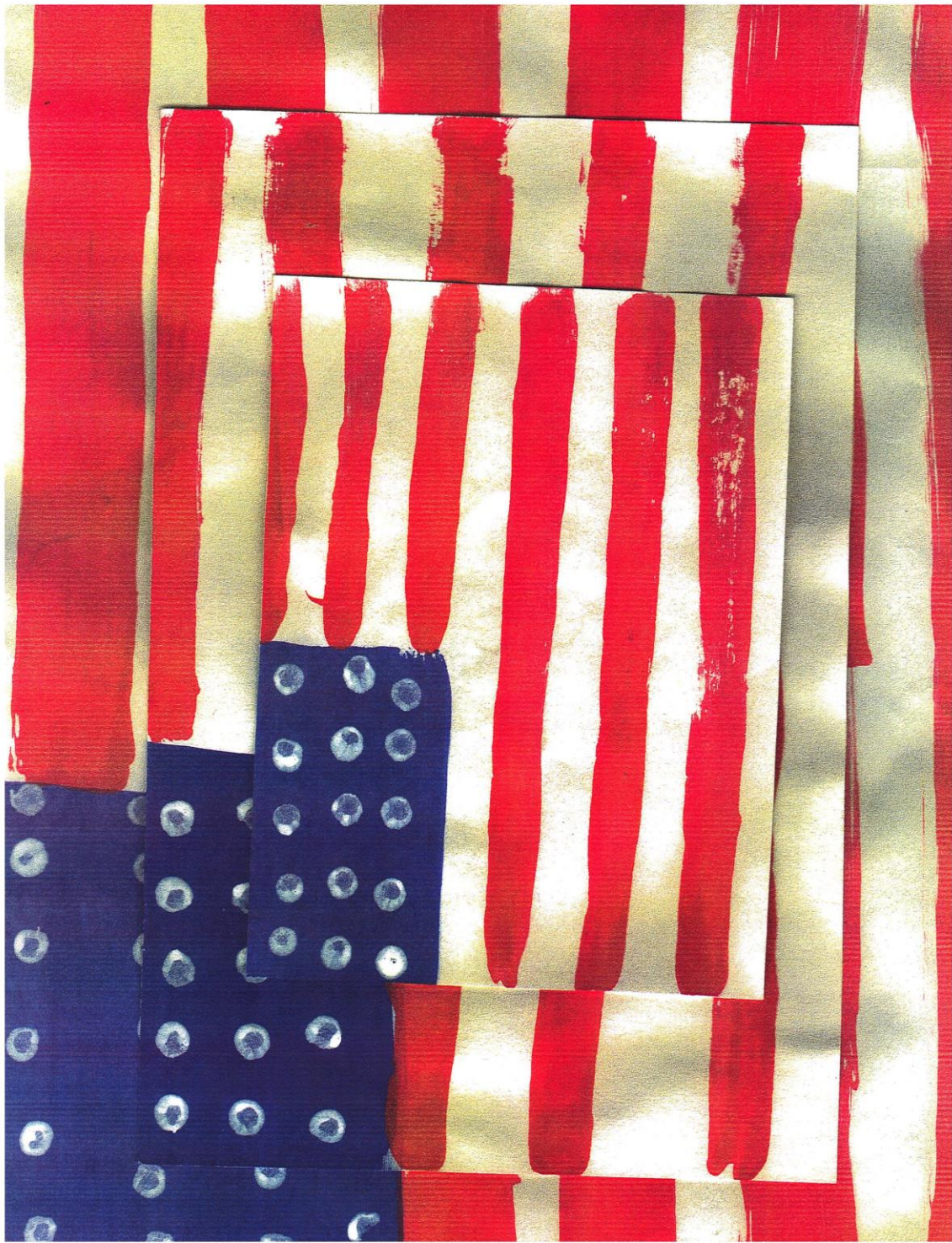
8. On their desk students should place the largest flag in front of them-facing up. Have students add glue to one side of a square of corrugated cardboard. Position that square in the center of the large flag. Press lightly.
9. Add glue to the top-side of that same corrugated square and lay the middle size flag on top of that square so that the middle size flag is centered on top of the large flag.
10. Repeat the process to add the smallest flag to the center of medium flag.
11. If the paint is slightly wet when gluing on the cardboard, the glue will still dry and adhere to the paper to the cardboard.
12. Mount on black paper. (Optional)

Clean-up. Please make sure to rinse all brushes thoroughly and store brush side up to prevent mold and disfigurement of brush.

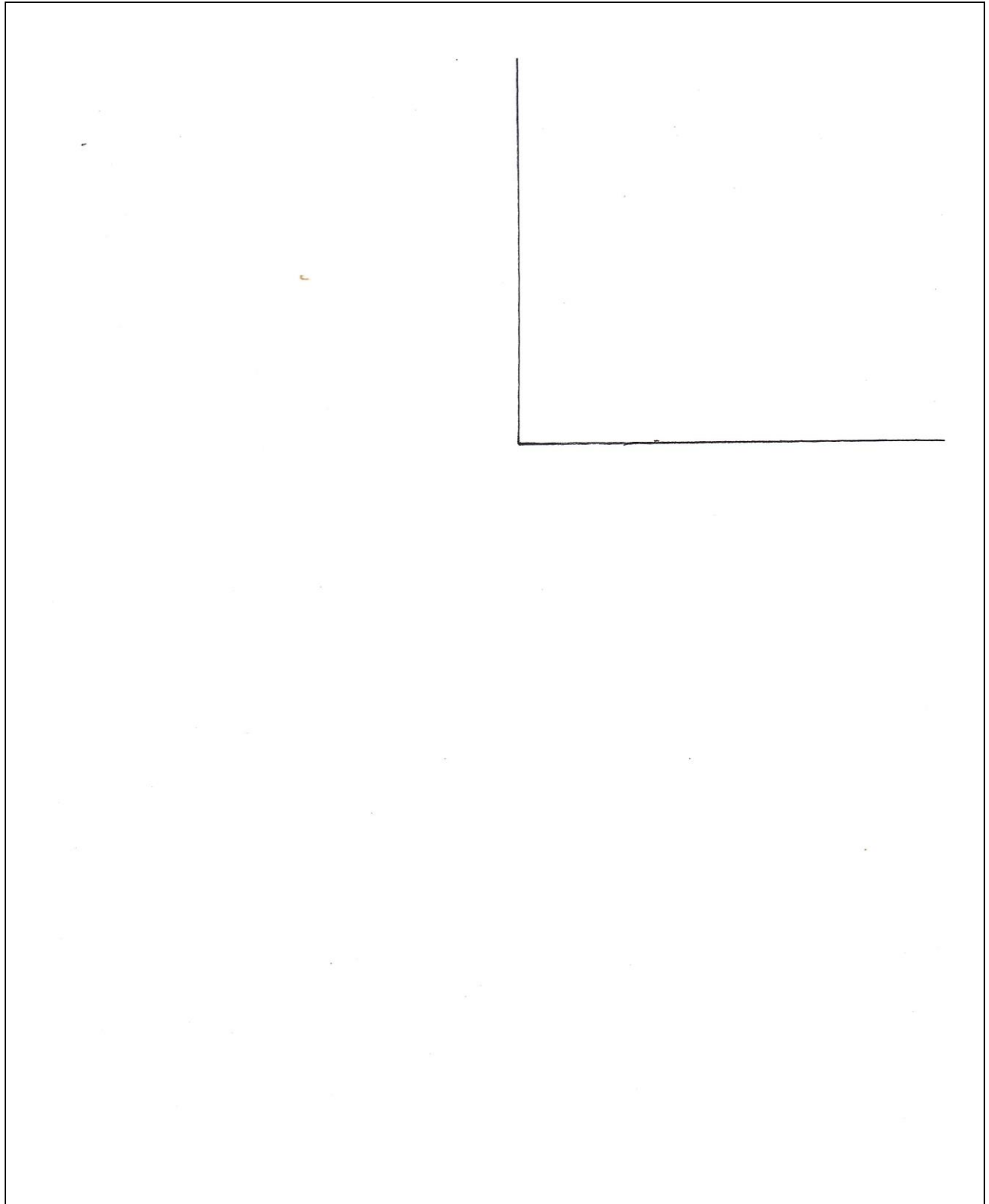
Examples:

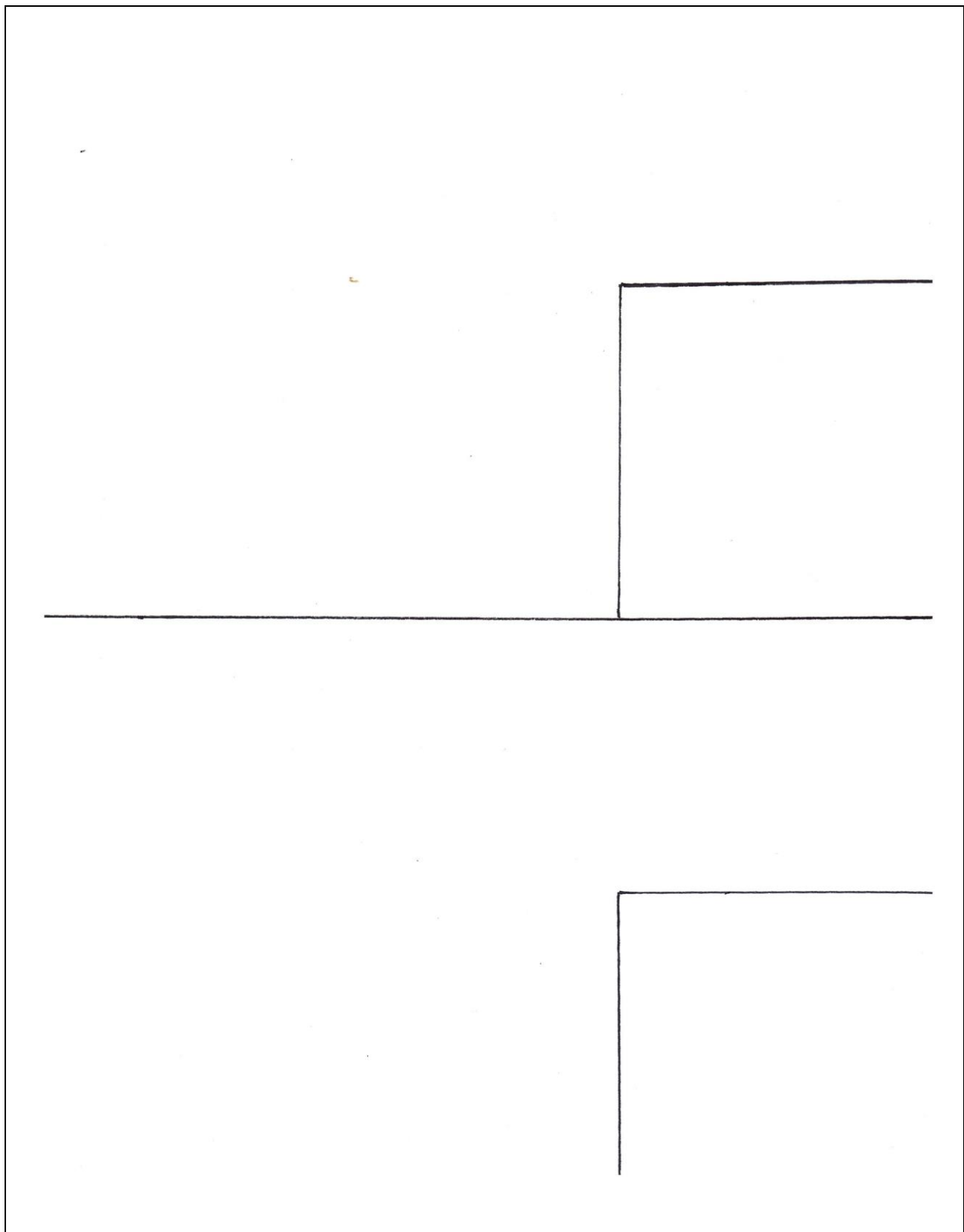


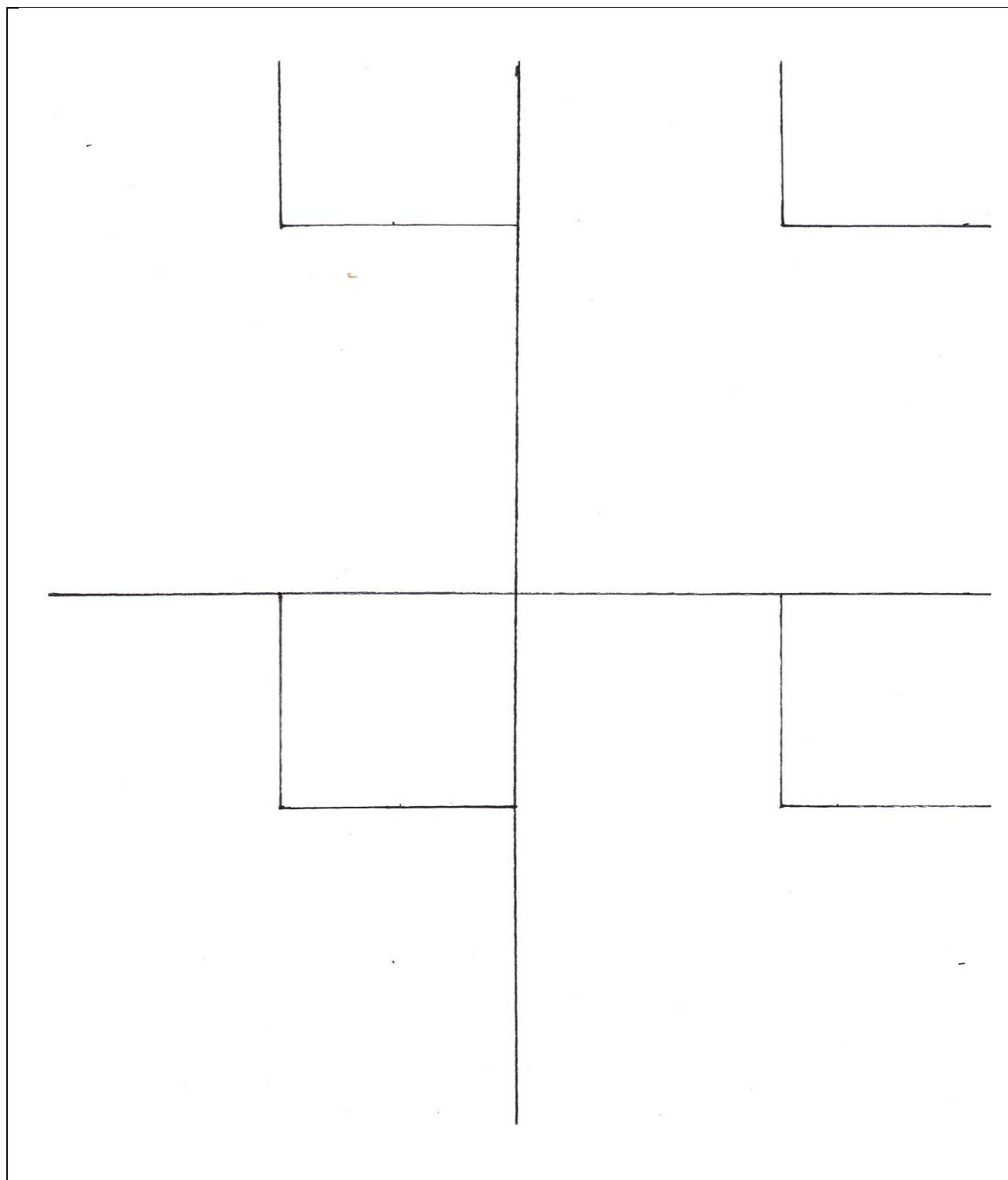
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Parent Note:

Today in Art Masterpiece your child learned about American Pop-artist Jasper Johns. John's *Three Flags* was used to show the students line, repetition, and symmetry. We also discussed symbolism.

Students then made their own "pop-art" version of the American Flag.



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Extra Help Needed Note:

We need extra hands!!

The next Art Masterpiece lesson could use some extra helping hands. If you can, please come and lend your hands on _____ at _____.
(date) (time)

Thanks so much!

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