Masterpiece: *Blue Atmosphere*, 1963
by Helen Frankenthaler

Pronunciation: FRANK-en-thah-ler

Keywords: Abstract Expressionism, Organic shapes, Colors

Grade: Kindergarten

Month: September

Activity: Abstract Expressionism Painting

Size: 25 ⅜ x 15 ⅜

Meet the Artist:
- Born in 1928 in New York City to wealthy parents. She went to good schools and had the opportunity to travel. She even studied in Mexico while in high school.
- She met Jackson Pollock who was very inspirational- splatter paint style on the floor. She didn't copy his style but developed her own. They we’re both considered **Abstract Expressionism**
- Abstract Expressionism- painting movement:
  - applied paint rapidly with force
  - tried to show feelings and emotion
  - non-objective (no objects or even geometric shapes, such as circles, squares, triangle, etc.)
  - appears accidental but actually was planned out
  - the expressive manner in which the artist painted the artwork was often considered as important as the painting itself.
- Thought of as a pioneer and the first artist to use “soak and stain” method. She thinned her paint and let it soak in. She would pour onto the canvas instead of using a brush. Would leave splatter marks and drips to show how she does the process. This style was called **Color Field Painting**.
- Received a Lifetime Achievement Award 10 years ago and has had countless one-woman exhibitions, which was difficult for women to achieve through the years.

Possible Questions
- What do you see? Color, shapes (Outlines with space inside creates shapes)
- Do the shapes look like anything (clouds?)
- Does it look like the artist used a brush-why or why not?
- How do you think she did it? (dropping or pouring)
- Do you think she planned where she poured the paint or just did it with no planning?
- What colors do you see?
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- Do these certain colors make you feel one way or another?
- Do you see shapes on top of one another? painted and dried then painted on top
- Does this change the color?
- Does the painting make you feel a certain way?
- Why do you think she called it Blue Atmosphere? What would you call it?

**Geometric shapes** - shapes that are commonly found in geometry, such as squares, triangles and rectangles

**Organic shapes** - shapes that are commonly found in nature, usually with curved, irregular lines

**Activity:** The students are going to make their own abstract painting in the style of Helen Frankenthaler.

**Materials needed:** white construction paper 9x12 & 12x18, tempera paint (red, blue, yellow), plastic spoons, paint containers, water containers, and large foam brushes

**Process:**
1. Tell the students that they will layer colors using watered-down tempera paint. Mix the paint kind of watery: 1 part paint, to 1 or 2 parts water. It won't spread on the paper well if not runny enough.
2. Pass out supplies and have students write their name and room number on the back of the small white paper. Each table should have two sets of paint, 2 large foam brushes and 2 water containers, plus small and large paper per student.
3. First have them place the small paper on top of the large paper, then wet the small paper using a foam brush. The water should be wet, but not have large pools on the paper. If it does have them lift one corner and let it run off.
4. While the paper is still wet, the children should drip colors onto the paper. Have them observe the paint as it spreads and runs together. They may lift the corners of the larger paper to let the paint roll on the page, but not too much as the colors will get muddy.
5. Remind them that they will be using small amounts of paint on the wet paper. Too much paint and the colors will not spread.
6. Leave the small paper on top of the larger piece and let dry. It is much easier to move them to the counters with a larger piece beneath.
7. Please mount on black construction paper and label with students name.

These look really great and will be displayed at the Art Walk.
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Wet Paper
Dribble Paint

More Paint Colors
Tip Paper
Aimee's Helen Frankenthaler Gallery

"I've explored a variety of directions and themes over the years. But I think in my painting you can see the signature of one artist, the work of one wrist."

-Helen Frankenthaler

An American Abstract Expressionist painter, Helen Frankenthaler was born December 12, 1928 in New York City, New York as the youngest child of a New York Supreme Court justice. She attended private schools in New York City, then went to Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont, where she studied under Hans Hofmann at the Art Students' League. From 1958 to 1971, she was married to the Abstract Expressionist painter Robert Motherwell.

Although greatly influenced by Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky and others, she soon developed her own approach to painting. She treated each painting as a new work that had its own unique requirements. She started experimenting with stain painting, where an unstretched and unprimed canvas lying on the floor would be treated with heavily diluted oil-based paints to be soaked directly into the fabric. She created silky pools of color that, although abstract, evoked images of landscapes. As Whitney Chadwick said of Frankenthaler, "She was not the first artist to stain canvases but she was the first to develop a complete formal vocabulary from the technique." Her techniques influenced other artists, especially Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis.

Frankenthaler is significant to the 1950s because of her contributions to Abstract Expressionism. As the name suggests, this form of art is important in any understanding of the Fifties because it combines abstraction and expressionism. Expressionism itself emphasizes the emotional responses from both the artist and the viewer. The voices of a new America as heard in authors such as Jack Keroauc and Allen Ginsberg are seen in artists such as Frankenthaler. It is also important that Frankenthaler, as a woman, steps beyond the traditional gender roles. Helen Frankenthaler is nonconformist both in her art and life.


http://www.stfrancis.edu/content/en/student/beatart/frank.htm