Henri Matisse (1869 – 1954)

The Beast of the Sea (1950)
Gouache on paper, cut and pasted, 60 5/8” x 116 3/8”

Pronounced: On-ree Mah-tees
Art Terms: Gouache Decoupee, Shape, Pattern
Activity: Painting with Scissors
Medium: Colored construction paper

Meet the Artist

- Henri Matisse was born in France in 1869, around the time the telephone was invented. His parents owned a general store and his dad wanted Henri to be a lawyer. When he was around 18 he became a lawyer.
- He first started to paint when he was 20. He had appendicitis and while he was bed ridden his mother gave him a paint set. He discovered “a kind of paradise” as he later described it, and decided to become an artist, deeply disappointing his father.
- Matisse went to art school but didn’t like the realistic way he was being taught to paint. He wanted to use bolder and brighter colors. He wanted to be more expressive.
- His critics named him the “King of the Wild Beasts” because of his expressive artwork. He responded by wearing a sheepskin lined coat inside out to look more “beastly”.
- He married and had 3 children. His wife owned a hat shop, and she supported him, making it possible for him to remain an artist.
- Late in his life he was confined to a wheelchair and began a new phase of his career creating cut paper collages called gouache decoupee. He called this new technique “painting with scissors”.
- Matisse’s art became famous for its bright colors and vivid patterns.
- He died at the age of 84 from a heart attack.

About the Art Work

Late in his career, Matisse began experimenting with simple paper cutouts (papier decoupee), which he made into collages. To make the collages, he first
had his assistant paint sheets of white paper with **gouache** (a type of paint) to give it a bright color. Then he cut out shapes, arranged them, pinned them into place, and finally glued them down on a sheet of paper.

Cutting the shapes himself gave Matisse complete control over the artwork. He called this new technique “painting with scissors”. Cutting into the paper left a clean edge, much like the clean lines of his drawings, but the weight of the paper against the scissors reminded him of sculpture. Matisse’s cutouts look different from his other works, but they follow the same themes and continue his use of bright colors and patterns.

**Art Terms**

**Gouache Decoupee** (Pronounced: *Goa-wash Day-coo-pay*)
- White paper painted with **gouache** (a type of paint) to give the paper a bright color. Matisse would then create cut paper collages called gouache decoupee’s.

**Pattern**
- The repetition of shapes, lines or colors in a design.

**Shape**
- Wherever the ends of a continuous line meet, a shape is formed.

**Questions about The Beast of the Sea**
- Why do you think Matisse titled this artwork *The Beast of the Sea*? What title would you give it?
- How many different colors do you see? Can you name some of them?
- Can you see shapes in this picture? Wherever the ends of a continuous line meet, a **shape** is formed. Geometric shapes such as circles, triangles or squares have perfect, uniform measurements and don't often appear in nature. Organic shapes are associated with things from the natural world, like plants and animals.
- Can you see patterns in this picture? **Patterns** are when lines or designs are repeated.

**Activity**

Painting with Scissors – Colored Construction Paper

**Supplies**
- Colored construction paper – 12” x 18”
- Colored construction paper – 6” x 4 1/2” (4 per student)
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Pencils
Directions

1. Each child should have (1) 12” x 18” sheet of construction paper, (4) 6” x 4 1/2” pieces of construction paper (they may be the same color or a variety of colors).

2. Have the students write their name and room number on the back of the 12” x 18” paper. Collect the pencils.

3. Have the children make a checkerboard pattern on their paper. Do not glue down.

4. Remove one rectangle shape from the checkerboard pattern. Cut a shape out of the middle of the paper.
   o To create symmetrical (even) shapes fold the paper in half and cut out a shape from the folder side of the paper.
   o To create asymmetrical (uneven) shapes place scissors at the edge of the rectangle and cut into the paper cutting a shape out of the middle. (Do not exit the shape at the edge.)
5. Do not discard any of the paper, they will use it all.
6. Ask the children to look at the two shapes that were created. The shape that was cut out of the paper is called the **positive shape** and the shape that is left over is called the **negative shape**.
   - **Positive shape** - the shape itself
   - **Negative shape** - the area around a shape or in between shapes, where you can see the background behind a shape
7. Instruct the students to lay their **negative shape** back into the checkerboard pattern and their **positive shape** in the empty shape below or above the negative shape OR children can make the checkerboard with the negative shapes and randomly place the positive shapes.

8. Once the students have cut out all their shapes they can now carefully glue the pieces down. **They will need to glue ALL the negative shapes down first and then add the positive shapes.**