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

**Pronounced:** Va-SEE-lee Kan-din-skee  
**Keywords:** Abstract, Color Theory: Warm, Cool and Neutral  
**Grade:** 1st Grade  
**Month:** May  
**Activity:** Concentric Circles

**Also show the students**  
*Study for Composition No.2, 1909-10* and compare and contrast.

“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 (show students ‘Couple Riding’ on PowerPoint CD) 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: Using the color wheel, demonstrate basic color theory to the students
  o Primary colors: Red, Yellow and Blue. All other colors can be made from mixing these three colors.
  o Secondary colors: Equal amounts of two primary colors.  
    Yellow + Red = Orange,  Blue + Yellow = Green,  Red + Blue = Purple.
  o Complimentary colors: Colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel.  
    Show color wheel.
    Red and Green,  Blue and Orange,  Violet and Yellow
  o Neutral colors: Not associated with a color: browns, blacks, grays and whites.  
    Neutral colors are used to change value of a color.  Example: Red + white = pink

How do colors make you feel? Warm colors are: red, orange, yellow -- artists use warm colors to demonstrate happiness and attract the eye.  Red is the hottest.  
Cool colors are: blue, green and violet are used to show moodiness, sadness.

Possible Questions:
  o What do you see in this painting?
  o 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.
  o Do you think having Synaesthesia helped him in selecting colors?
  o What shapes do you see the most?
  o Are these shapes "perfect"?
  o What is a concentric circle? Explain.
  o What does a circle represent to you? (Kandinsky believed that the circle is the most peaceful shape and represents the human spirit.)  What about a square?
  o Looking at the print -- Can you find the square that has all warm colors? Cool colors?
  o Where are the neutral colors? Explain that neutral colors are typically
considered light brown (beige), greys, white. Neutral colors generally don't stimulate the eye so they artists using them as background.

- Where is the square where the red has less intensity?

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

**Note to Art Coordinator or Guide for Class Preparation:**
To divide the paper into 6 equal squares; fold the 12” side of paper into three sections each measuring 4”. Then, open the paper and fold the 9” side in half (hot dog fold) to create the horizontal line across the center of the sheet. Unfold paper so there are six squares.

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), water-soluble markers, watercolor set, medium sized paintbrushes, art mats, cups for water

**Process:**
1. Cover desks with art mats. Hand out watercolor paper, colored markers and a watercolor set to each student. Place cups of water on each workstation for 2-3 students to share. You will need to replace dirty water with clean water as necessary.
2. Have student label back of their paper with name.
3. Have the students lay the paper in front of them like a place mat.
4. Explain to students that they will begin by drawing concentric circles in each of the six boxes using their selection of colored markers. This is also a lesson on listening so they will need to carefully listen to you as you explain each step.
5. Have students select one of the six boxes and any colored marker. Draw a big circle so the circle edges touch the outside edge of the box. Demonstrate this step. Continue drawing big circles in remaining boxes using a different colored marker.
6. Now have them go back to each box and draw a slightly smaller circle in each box using different colored markers.
7. Continue the concentric circles until there are five circles in each box.

**Before they begin the watercolors:** Again, explain to students that this is also a lesson on listening….they will need to carefully listen to you as you explain each step. Write the following directions on the board as you proceed. They will work as a class and should not work ahead on this. Also, expect the paint to run into each other. The
artist allowed his paint to drip into each other and this makes for a beautiful end result.

8. Have students select any one of the squares to begin and with watercolors, paint that square using all the warm colors. Write on board: “1 square with all warm colors.”

9. Select another square and paint that square using all cool colors. Write on board.
10. Select a third square and paint using all neutral colors. Write on board. *See below.
11. Select a fourth square and paint using a combination of warm and cool colors. Write on board.
12. Finally the last 2 squares can be painted using their choice of color. Write on board.

* Remind students that more water on their brushes will make the paint more transparent and lighter. Using 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 1st 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