



Edie McKee Harper, *Crazy Cat on Crazy Quilt (Patches)*, about 1990, acrylic on canvas, 11 1/8 x 17 3/4 in. Collection of Brett Harper
All artworks © Edie McKee Harper

Edie McKee Harper. Modernist at Play

Exhibition Guide and Classroom Resources

What's Inside

Pg. 3 Welcome to the Taft

Pg. 5 Exhibition Guide and Classroom Resource Introduction

Pg. 6 Edie Harper Biography

Pg. 8 Exhibition Introduction

Pg. 11 Curricular Connections

Pg. 13 Key Vocabulary

Pg. 15 Introduction and Early Life

Pg. 23 The American Landscape

Pg. 31 Abstraction – Photography

Pg. 40 Abstraction – Textiles and Enamels

Pg. 50 Storytelling

Pg. 58 The Animal World

Welcome to the Taft Museum of Art

The Taft Museum of Art offers a unique, multi-sensory experience that immerses audiences in spaces to learn, create, and connect—within and beyond its walls. Visitors can enjoy the [collection](#), [exhibitions](#), [events](#), and [programming for all ages](#), a beautiful garden, the Museum Shop, the [Taft Café](#)—and so much more.

The museum's collection galleries are located in the Baum-Longworth-Sinton-Taft historic house—downtown Cincinnati's oldest wooden residence still in its original location. The mansion was home to generations of prominent Cincinnatians, including Martin Baum, Nicholas Longworth, David Sinton, Anna Sinton Taft, and Charles Phelps Taft.

The house was built around 1820 for businessman Martin Baum and purchased in 1830 by horticulturalist and art patron Nicholas Longworth. Longworth hired Robert S. Duncanson, who later became the first Black American artist to earn an international reputation, to paint [eight large landscapes](#) and four smaller still-lives on the walls of his entry hall. These are now recognized as the most important pre-Civil War domestic murals in the United States. In 1976, the Taft historic house and the Duncanson murals were designated as National Historic Landmarks.

After Longworth's residency, David Sinton and his daughter, Anna, occupied the house. Anna married Charles Phelps Taft in 1873, and the couple lived in the house for over fifty years. When Anna inherited her father's fortune in 1900, she and Charles began collecting art. In 1927, they bequeathed their house

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org



and collection of 530 works to the people of Cincinnati. The Taft Museum of Art opened in 1932.

The Taft [collection](#), now numbering over 800 works of art, features Chinese porcelains, American furniture, and European decorative arts, including a remarkable collection of French Renaissance enamels and one of the most exceptional medieval ivory sculptures in the United States. The major holdings of European and American paintings include works by such leading artists as Thomas Gainsborough, Francisco Goya, Rembrandt van Rijn, John Singer Sargent, J. M. W. Turner, and James McNeill Whistler.

In 2004, the museum opened a renovated and expanded building with a new exhibition gallery, classroom, lecture hall, café, shop, and workspaces, and redecorated the house's interiors to present different design eras: from the house's construction in about 1820 through the last years of the Tafts' residency in the 1920s. Today, the museum presents changing exhibitions in the Fifth Third and Sinton galleries as well as rotating installations in the collection galleries. The museum completed the Bicentennial Infrastructure Project in 2022 to preserve the 200-year-old historic house—the Taft's largest work of art.

Exhibition Guide and Classroom Resource

Introduction

This exhibition guide introduces classroom teachers to Edie Harper's artwork, life, and career. As exemplified in the exhibition, *Edie McKee Harper: Modernist at Play*, Harper was a lifelong artist who approached various media with vigor and enthusiasm, resulting in humorous and sincere works of art. Through an exploration of her work, students will examine visual abstraction, composition, and storytelling.

To facilitate classroom learning and engagement, this guide includes information about the exhibition and the major themes explored in Harper's work. Additionally, teachers will find biographical information about the artist, curricular connections, and classroom activities focused on selected works from the exhibition. Each activity includes looking and discussion questions as well as a creative project designed to help students approach ideas in the same experimental and playful way Harper approached her art. Each activity is intended to be best suited to a particular grade level, but adaptation suggestions are provided.

A slide show presentation for the works featured in this resource guide can be found digitally at: [Edie McKee Harper: Modernist at Play Slide Show](#)

Artist Biography

Edie McKee Harper (1922–2010) was an artist from Cincinnati, Ohio, who valued minimalism and modernism in her work. Harper described herself as a “Jill of all trades” and worked in numerous media, including painting, drawing, printmaking, weaving, enameling, and photography.

Harper was born in Kansas City, Missouri. Her family moved to Cincinnati, where she attended high school, then enrolled at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. There, she learned about abstraction and experimentation as she worked through the standard four-year curriculum. The art academy's proximity to the Cincinnati Art Museum, which also housed the Modern Art Society (later the Contemporary Arts Center), meant that she was exposed to the work of contemporary artists as well as a wealth of ancient and traditional art.

Harper also enrolled in the school's first photography classes. She proved so skilled in this medium that, while yet a student, she was hired by the Army Corps of Engineers to document its experiments with soil, concrete, and airplane materials.

Throughout her life, Harper was inspired by modernist ideas, experimenting with surrealism and cubism and drawing on Indigenous traditions as well as contemporary art and design. She engaged in artistic inquiry in a playful spirit, creating abstracted images of familiar subjects: the animal kingdom, the American landscape, biblical imagery, and childhood memories. She integrated storytelling into her work through her use of visual and verbal puns

in titles and captions. Her visual language of geometric shapes, colors, angles, lines, and patterns created strong compositions; her abstraction produced lively minimalist images; and her tongue-in-cheek approach conveyed humor. Harper distilled complex ideas into their core elements and pared subjects down to their essence. Her work showcases her vivid imagination and wit.

In 1947, Harper married fellow artist Charley Harper, whom she met while attending the Art Academy. They embarked on a six-month honeymoon that took them across the western United States and resulted in numerous works by both artists. The couple welcomed a son in 1953. Harper deftly balanced motherhood and her artistic pursuits, achieved, in part, by active participation in her community. She continued to make photographs and enter them in exhibitions and was honored with a solo show at the Contemporary Arts Center in 1961. She also continued to take classes in media new to her, such as enameling and ceramics. A class in weaving led her to join the Weavers Guild of Greater Cincinnati, where she formed a tapestry weaving study group and learned to spin and dye wool. On occasion she demonstrated weaving techniques, for example during the Cincinnati Art Museum's *Art of the First Americans* exhibit. Late in her career, Harper illustrated a children's picture book.

Harper participated or was featured in at least seventy exhibitions throughout her lifetime, including at the Contemporary Arts Center and Cincinnati Art Museum. She followed an unusual path, mastering multiple media and continuing to experiment with her work. Her outlook teaches us to approach art with a sense of wonder, joy, and freedom.

Edie McKee Harper. Modernist at Play

About the exhibition:

Edie McKee Harper. Modernist at Play is the first museum exhibition to focus solely on the full range of Edie Harper's artistic production. Often overshadowed by the popularity of her husband and fellow artist, Charley Harper, Edie Harper deserves individual attention for her playful and minimalistic approach as well as her mastery of a variety of media. Tracing her sixty-year-long career, this exhibition features approximately 100 works of art, including paintings, photographs, enamels, and weavings, that explore four major themes: the American landscape, abstraction, storytelling, and the animal world.

Harper's exploration of the American landscape is a unique look at the people, places, and monuments that tell the story of the United States. Through her distinctive style—simplified compositions enhanced by bold shapes, colors, and high contrasts—Harper captured the essence of the America she encountered through her travels and her daily life, providing the viewer a window into the America of the mid- to late-twentieth century.

Harper was an adept visual storyteller, often allowing a small detail or single component to carry the weight of a complex idea or narrative. Similar to her works examining the American landscape, her images of fairy tales, biblical stories, and the animal world showcase this skill. Enhanced by her signature abstraction, Harper's narrative images capture the viewer's attention and spark curiosity.

Key themes and takeaways for learners:

Edie Harper's artwork and this exhibition connect to key Common Core Standards and National Visual Arts Standards, which are detailed on the following pages. However, there are two key themes embodied by Harper's artwork that directly connect to core aspects of social and emotional learning: playfulness and experimentation. Harper's work exhibits playfulness not only through her use of form and color, but also in her tongue-in-cheek titles and use of childhood pastimes and situations for inspiration. This sense of playfulness reinforces the idea that learning can be fun. Through play, students explore new situations and reframe experiences. They learn that levity and positivity can improve outcomes.

Play is connected to experimentation. Harper experimented throughout her career with various media, never settling into just one way of making art. Experimentation necessitates uncertainty—you aren't always going to get it right the first time. You will have to adjust your approach and keep trying in order to achieve your desired outcome. Prioritizing experimentation, often through play or with a playful mindset, allows students to develop grit and determination as well as creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

A final principle found in Harper's work that is valuable for students is distillation. Harper's minimalistic and modernist approach to her work allowed her to represent the core essence of ideas and narratives free of extraneous details. Her work visually highlights how even complicated concepts can be communicated in simple ways, leaving open the possibility of interpretation by the viewer. As students encounter increasingly complex concepts the ability to identify and understand the key components becomes crucial. Harper's visually engaging artworks are an excellent example of this.

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org



Exhibition organized by the Taft Museum of Art in partnership with the Charley and Edie Harper Art Studio.

Curricular Connections

The educational standards below apply to artworks presented in the exhibition *Edie McKee Harper: Modernist at Play* and the classroom activities found within this exhibition guide.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

Reading:

- Standard 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Writing:

- Standard 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Standard 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Speaking and Listening:

- Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Standard 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Literacy in History/Social Studies:

- Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- Standard 2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- Standard 7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

National Visual Arts Standards

- Creating
 - Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Responding
 - Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
 - Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
 - Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
- Connecting
 - Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
 - Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Key Vocabulary

Abstract: an art style that does not show things in a realistic way. Abstract art relies on shape, form, color, line, etc. to convey objects, emotions, and ideas.

Abstraction: to reduce the realistic aspect of something, to take something from looking realistic to looking unrealistic.

Composition: the organization of forms (items) within an artwork.

Distillation: a process that purifies and isolates components of a mixture, used here to describe the process of selecting and isolating key visual components of a narrative or idea and representing them in a visual artwork.

Experimentation: the process of testing new ideas, techniques, or concepts to approach one's own artwork with a sense of discovery.

Minimalism: in the visual arts minimalism is characterized by simple forms, clean lines, and a limited color palette.

Modernism: a collection of movements in art from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries that were characterized by the rejection of traditional methods and subject matter and a shift away from realism. Modernism turned its focus toward abstraction and embracing new and different perspectives.

Representational: visual artworks that portray recognizable subjects found in the real world.

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org



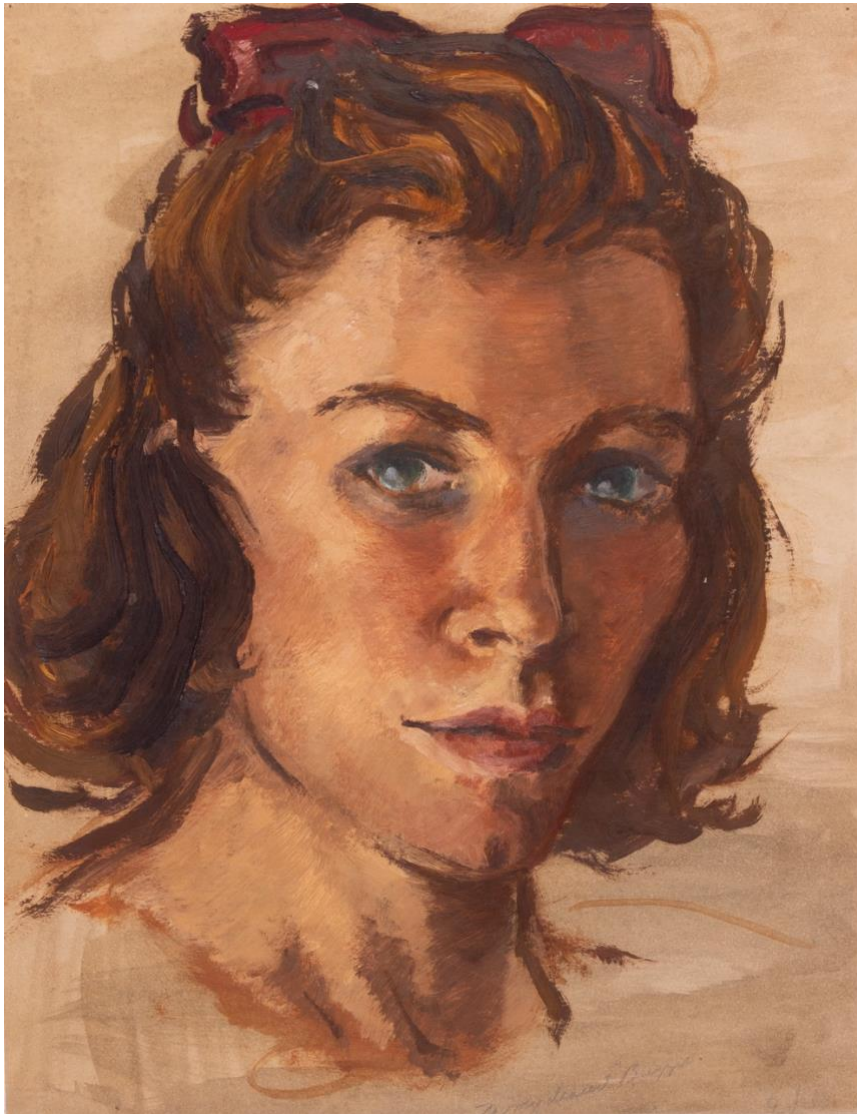
Tongue-in-cheek: clever or humorous phrases that express meaning beyond the standard definition of the words that make up the phrase.

Visual Language: colors, forms, symbols, etc. that communicate shared messages throughout a culture or society.

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org

taft
MUSEUM OF ART

Introduction and Early Life



Edie McKee Harper, *Self-Portrait*, 1947, gouache and watercolor paper, 15 x 11 5/8 in.
Collection of Brett Harper

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org

taft
MUSEUM OF ART



Edie McKee Harper, *Self-Portrait*, 1947, oil on board, 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Collection of Brett Harper

Harper created these two self-portraits when she was 25 years old. At the time, Harper was a recent graduate of the Art Academy of Cincinnati. Her portraits allowed her to explore her creative impulses and experiment with abstraction. The first portrait uses gouache and watercolor to produce a realistic portrait, while the second uses oil painting to produce an abstract version. Harper was skilled in simplifying forms to create abstracted compositions. She pared items down to their essence, removed details, and emphasized the most basic elements, as seen in the second self-portrait. In the late 1950s, Harper began to develop an abstract visual language using simple shapes and lines for features and bodies and incorporating geometry into her work.

Abstract Self-Portrait Lesson Plan



Grade level: K-2

Time to complete: 30 minutes

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will learn about and be able to produce an abstract visual language.
2. Students will learn to differentiate between different forms of art.
3. Students will learn to express their emotions and identity through art.
4. Students will be able to utilize visual language through geometric shapes, colors, angles, lines, and patterns to communicate meaning.

Learning Targets:

1. I can understand and experiment with abstraction.
2. I can differentiate between different forms of art.
3. I can use art to express my emotions and identity.
4. I can utilize visual language to communicate meaning.

Vocabulary:

Abstract: an art style that does not show things as realistic. Abstract art relies on shape, form, color, line, etc. to convey objects, emotions, and ideas.

Distillation: a process that purifies and isolates components of a mixture, used here to describe the process of selecting and isolating key visual components of a narrative or idea and representing them in a visual artwork.

Portrait: a work of art representing a person. A self-portrait is a work of art that represents the artist who created it.

Visual language: colors, forms, symbols, etc. that communicate shared messages throughout a culture or society.

First, let's look!

Give your students 1 minute to observe the two self-portraits. Then, ask your students how many shapes, lines, and colors they notice in each one. Is it easier to find lines and shapes in one painting than the other? Which one? Why do you think that?

Next, let's talk!

Use the following questions to discuss this artwork's style and subject matter. Encourage your students to use evidence from the artwork to support their answers.

1. What details do you notice in the two paintings? What adjectives would you use to describe them?
 - a. What similarities do you notice between the two paintings? What differences do you notice? What might the subjects be thinking or feeling in each of them? What makes you say that?
2. What do you think they like to do? Why do you think that?
3. What can we know about these people? What can we not know?
4. What questions do you want to ask them?
5. Think of a time when you have had your portrait or picture taken. What did you choose to wear? How did you choose to pose?
6. Why do you think the artist chose to create an abstract self-portrait?

Finally, let's create!

1. Using a current photo of yourself (or a mirror and your reflection) and Harper's self-portraits as inspiration, create an abstract self-portrait.

Materials:

- Paper and pencil
- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- A current photo of yourself or a mirror
- Shape and line template

Directions:

1. Explain the concept of abstraction to students and how Harper used abstraction to create her second self-portrait.
2. Have students look at their photo or reflection and notice what shapes and lines they see (e.g., oval eyes, round face, curly hair, etc.). Display (or pass out copies of) the shape and line template for students to reference.
3. Give each student paper and a pencil. Encourage them to sketch a self-portrait using only shapes and lines found on the template.
 - a. If students become stuck, remind them to look at their photo or reflection and ask them what shapes they see. How can they match the shapes they notice with the shapes they are challenged to use?

4. Students can consider adding clothing or a background to their abstract self-portrait using shapes and lines as well.
5. After sketching, encourage students to select 3 to 5 colors (markers, crayons, or colored pencils.) to complete their portrait.

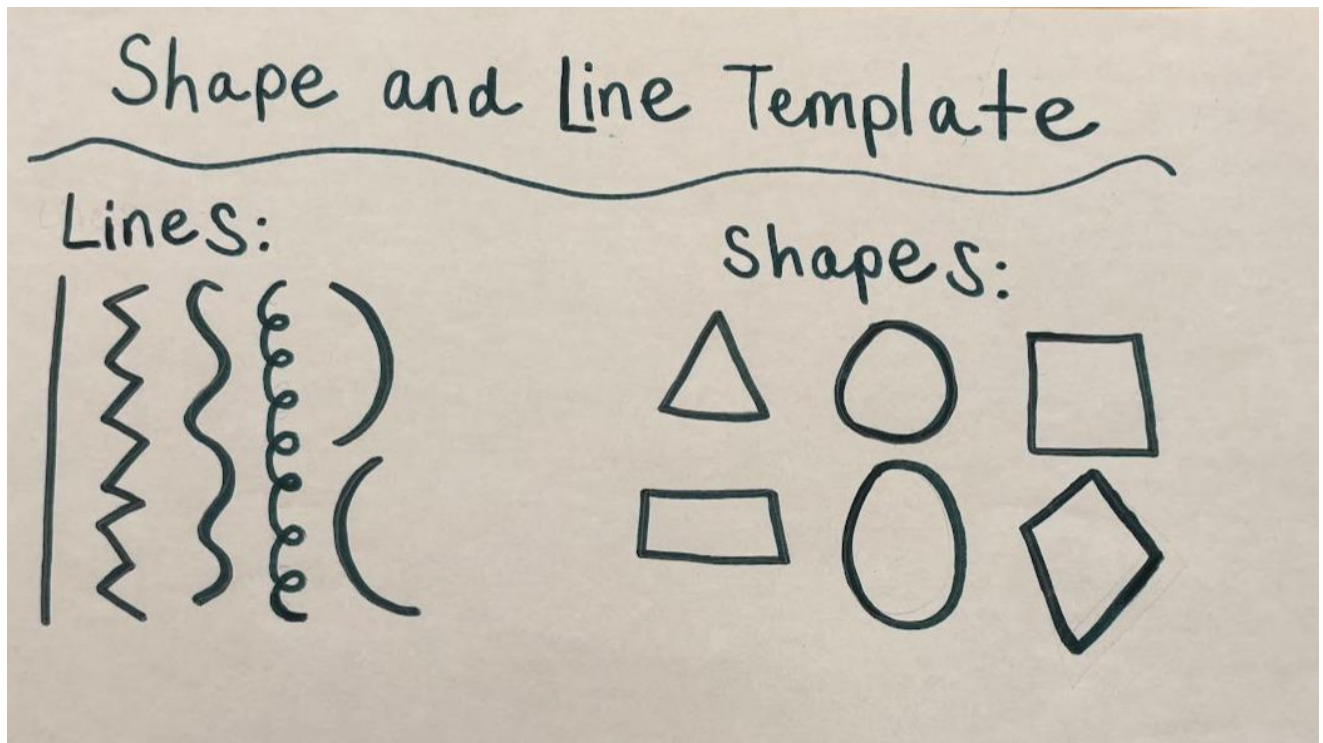
Extension options:

- Students can write a short story about their artwork or pair up with a classmate and create a fictional backstory for each other's self-portraits.
- Students can write a descriptive paragraph or poem about a classmate's self-portrait.

Adaptations for other grade levels:

For older students, eliminate the shape and line template and allow them to determine what shapes and lines they can use independently. Additionally, older students can use different materials, such as cut or torn paper, wire, or air-dry clay, to create their self-portrait. Encourage students to experiment, like Harper, with everyday materials, such as straws, buttons, bottle caps, aluminum foil, fabric scraps, or newspaper and magazine cutouts.

Shape and Line Template



The American Landscape



Edie McKee Harper, *Mt. Rushmore*, about 1955, cut paper and gouache on illustration board, 10 5/8 x 15 1/8 in. Collection of Brett Harper

In this artwork, Edie Harper highlights Mount Rushmore, an iconic American monument located in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Featuring Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Lincoln, Mount Rushmore was intended to “communicate the foundation, expansion, preservation, and unification of the United States.” (<https://www.nps.gov/moru/index.htm>). Mount Rushmore has been a popular tourist destination since it was completed in 1941.

While the monument seems to be the primary focus of this artwork, Harper placed contemporary tourists enjoying a picnic prominently in the foreground, calling to mind family vacations and the classic American road trip. She seamlessly blends the historic weight of Mount Rushmore with personal experience.

My Monument Lesson Plan



Grades: 9–12

Time: 30 minutes

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will be able to discuss Edie Harper's life and artwork.
2. Students will be able to explain visual abstraction and its effectiveness in communicating meaning.
3. Students will be able to explain what monuments are and how they convey messages about what is important to a group of people.
4. Students will be able to think critically about public art.

Learning Targets:

1. I can talk about abstraction in art.
2. I can use abstraction in visual art to convey meaning.
3. I can discuss monuments like Mount Rushmore and what they mean.
4. I can formulate questions about monuments and what they mean.
5. I can discuss how an artwork can convey many ideas, meanings, and feelings and how different people will have different interpretations of the same artwork.

Vocabulary:

Abstraction: in visual art, to represent something that exists in the real world in an unrealistic, sometimes unrecognizable, way.

Minimalism: in visual art, using the least amount of shapes, colors, and lines as possible to create your images.

Monument: something created to commemorate a notable person, people, or event. A monument can be a work of art, a building, or other type of structure.

First, let's look!

Show your students *Mt. Rushmore* and ask them to look closely for at least 30 seconds.

Options to enhance the looking experience:

- Encourage students to let their eyes wander and notice as many details and items as possible.
- Set a timer for 2 to 5 minutes and challenge your students to complete a blind contour drawing of *Mt. Rushmore*.
 - To complete a blind contour drawing, students will draw what they see without lifting their pencil off the paper and without looking down at the paper.

Next, let's talk!

Use the following questions to discuss this artwork's style and subject matter. Encourage your students to use evidence from the artwork to support their answers.

1. What is the first thing you notice when you look at this artwork?
2. What does this artwork represent? Why do you think that?
3. Edie Harper chose a monument that exists in real life. How did she choose to represent it? How does it differ from the actual monument?
4. What materials do you think Edie Harper used to create this artwork? How might it be different if she had chosen a different material?

5. Who are these figures and why do you think they were chosen for artwork? Consider the figures in both the background (top of the image) and the foreground (bottom of the image).
6. Why do you think Edie Harper represented the different figures the way she did?
7. Whose story is being told by this monument and whose stories are not being told?
8. What was this monument made to commemorate? Do you think it is successful? Why or why not?
9. What story do you think Edie Harper is telling with her artwork?

You can enhance your discussion of *Mt. Rushmore* by utilizing information found here: <https://www.nps.gov/moru/index.htm>

Finally, let's create!

Using Mount Rushmore as inspiration and Edie Harper's artwork as a guide, students will create their own abstract monument that represents something important about their world.

Materials:

- Paper (or other support material—cardboard, canvas board, etc.)
- Colored paper
- Scissors
- Glue sticks (or liquid glue)
- Pencils, markers, crayons, or other mark-making supplies

Directions:

1. After looking at and discussing Edie Harper's *Mt. Rushmore*, ask students to brainstorm who or what they would like to create a monument to.

Students should consider the following:

- a. The sculptor who designed Mount Rushmore, Gutzon Borglum, stated that he chose four presidents who represented the most important events in American history.
 - i. Ask students if they think Mount Rushmore achieves the goals the sculptor had for it. How do they feel about Mount Rushmore? How do current events and the history of the country between 1941 and now impact how we feel about and interpret Mount Rushmore?
- b. Students may also choose to represent an idea or concept that is important for them and their community, similar to the way Mount Rushmore was intended to represent American ideals of freedom and democracy.
 - i. Students should consider how they will visually represent the ideals they choose and consider the different ways their visual language may be interpreted by others.
 - ii. What other factors (communities, histories, feelings, etc.) do they need to consider when creating their monument (whose story are they telling and who will be impacted by their monument)?

2. Students may choose to research imagery and symbols related to their chosen people or concepts.
3. After brainstorming, discussing, and researching, students can use pencil and paper to sketch ideas before they begin their cut paper monument.
4. Students construct their monument using colored paper pieces (cut or torn) and glue on a large piece of paper or other support.
5. Once the major components have been laid down, students can use markers, pens, colored pencils, etc. to add details.

Things for students to consider when making:

- What components are crucial to represent their chosen subject?
- What basic shapes make up the things they want to include in their artwork?
- What is the fewest number of details they can use to convey their chosen meaning?

Extension options:

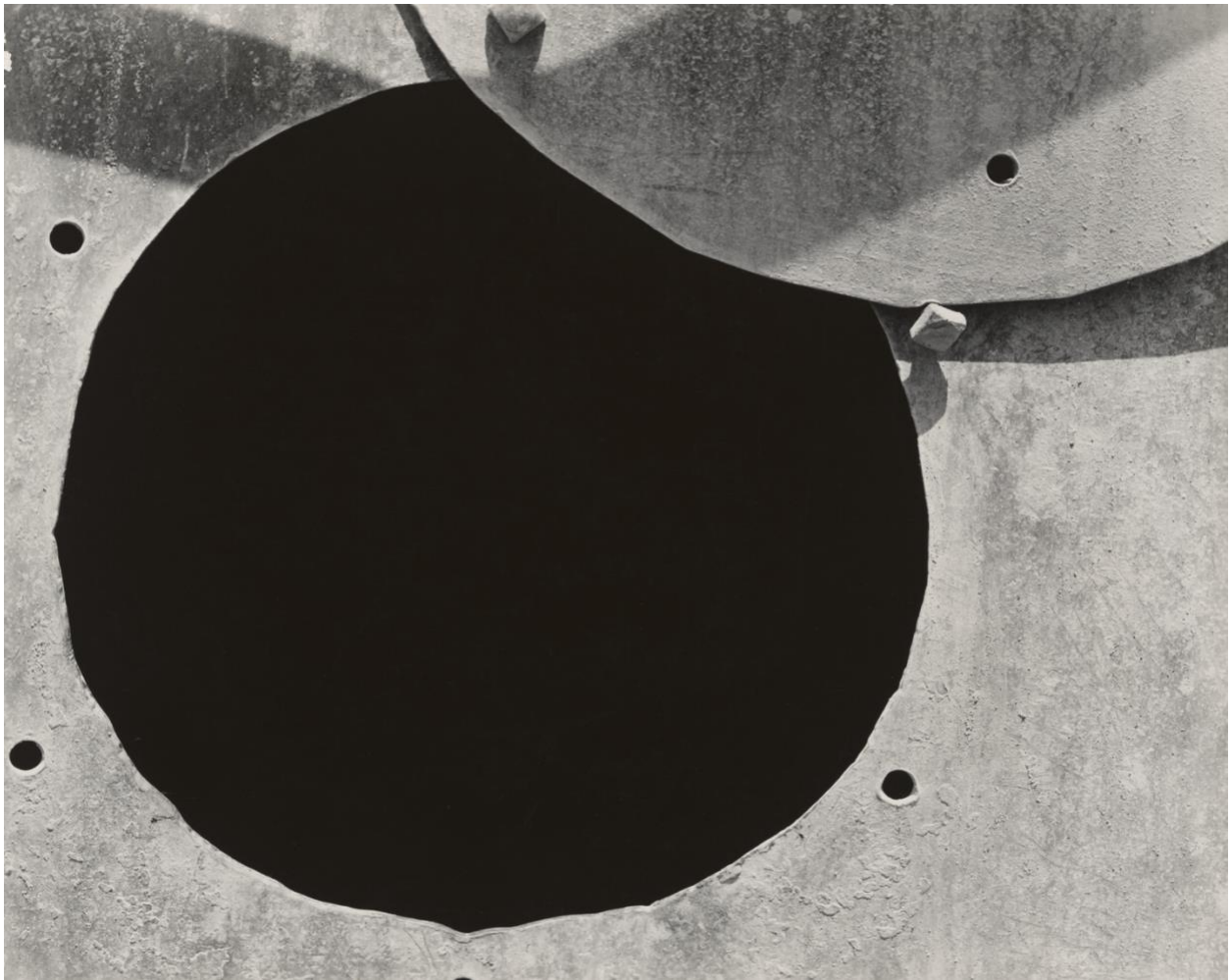
- Students can write a poem or narrative explaining the meaning of their monument.
- Students can research Mount Rushmore further and choose an aspect of its history as inspiration for a new monument or a larger research project.

Adaptations for other grade levels:

For early elementary students, discuss Harper's use of abstraction and minimalism. Using images of the Mount Rushmore monument as a guide, encourage students to make their own abstract version.

For middle grade students, brainstorm ideas for a monument collectively and challenge them to work collaboratively (in pairs or small groups) to create an abstract monument of their own.

Abstraction–Photography



Edie McKee Harper, *Untitled (Black Hole)*, probably late 1950s, gelatin silver print, 7 9/16 x 9 1/2 in. Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum Purchase with funds provided by Carl Jacobs, 2002.86

With this photograph, Edie Harper invites the viewer to see the shapes, textures, and colors of a commonplace object as an abstracted composition. While it's clear that we're looking at a hole and a cover, the orientation, purpose, and location of the hole become unimportant, while the tension and contrast between elements is drawn into focus. The frame is largely filled by a slightly irregular black circle. Partially eclipsing it, another circle slides out of the frame, linked to the background with a flowing, interrupted stripe.

Capturing Compositions Lesson Plan

Grades: K–3

Time: 20–30 minutes

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will explore and observe their surroundings in new ways through visual abstraction.
2. Students will play with composition through sensory-rich experiences of parts of a whole.
3. Students will practice flexible thinking through exploration of color, pattern, texture, and shape in their surroundings.
4. Students will connect to their surroundings and peers through group exploratory play.
5. Students will discuss Edie Harper's photograph, exploring meaning and finding inspiration.

Learning Targets:

1. I can observe and explore my surroundings visually.
2. I can create compositions using a viewfinder I made.
3. I can explore color, pattern, texture, and shape through art.
4. I can work with my friends to discover new ways of seeing.
5. I can look at artwork to inspire my artistic choices.

First, let's look!

Show your students *Untitled (Black Hole)* and ask them to look closely for at least 30 seconds.

Options to enhance the looking experience:

1. Set a timer for 2 to 5 minutes and challenge your students to recreate the image with black marker on white paper, or white chalk on black paper, noticing details and relationships between elements.

Next, let's talk!

Use the following questions to discuss this artwork's style and subject matter.

1. What is the first thing you notice when you look at this artwork?
2. How do you think this artwork was made? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What shapes do you see? What do they remind you of?
4. This artwork is a photograph. Where do you think Harper was when she took this photo?

5. What do you think was around this object/place that Harper photographed? Why do you think she left out the surroundings?
6. How do you think Harper found this image? Where did she go and what did she do?
7. Can you get up and show me how she may have looked when she was photographing this work?

Finally, let's create!

Using Edie Harper's artwork as inspiration, students will create viewfinders to search for interesting compositions and explore their surroundings through color, shape, texture, and pattern.

Materials:

- For each student: two 1.5" x 4" strips of heavier paper, and two 1" x 6" strips of heavier paper (you can provide different colors for students to choose from)
- Masking or clear tape
 - Glue sticks or glue dots would also work well
- Pencils, markers, crayons, or other mark-making supplies
- (Optional) ribbon or yarn to hang viewfinders around the neck
- (Optional) hole punch to create hole for ribbon or yarn

Directions:

After looking at and discussing *Untitled (Black Hole)*, invite students to explore their surroundings through a paper viewfinder they create, finding abstract

compositions by looking through the hole, and expressing themselves creatively by adding drawing or writing to their paper viewfinder.

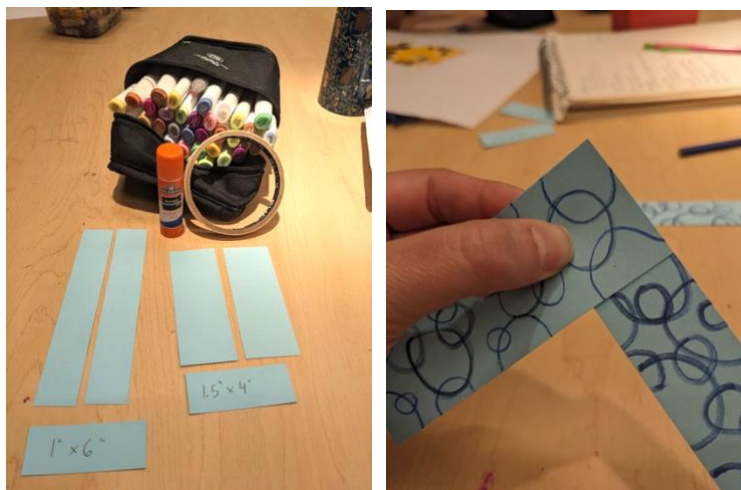
1. Distribute the paper strips and mark-making supplies, demonstrating how the viewfinder will be created by aligning the corners of the strips and adhering them together.
 - a. Note that four corners will be covered once glued or taped while demonstrating, so students can plan their decorations.
 - b. Invite students to practice creating a rectangle out of their strips before distributing mark-making materials and glue/tape.
2. Students may add their own drawings, patterns, or writing to the paper strips. Allow free exploration, drawing from materials and processes that support your classroom learning, or introduce a prompt for viewfinder artwork such as:
 - a. Decorate your strips with colors and patterns that represent something you love about your community.
 - b. Use the letters of your name to decorate your strips.
 - c. Decorate each of the four strips differently, describing four important things about you.
3. Following decoration, neatly glue or tape the corners of the strips together, forming a rectangular window.
4. (optional) Use a hole punch to make a hole on a shorter edge; thread a loop of ribbon or yarn through, long enough for students to hold viewfinders in front of them at arm's length. Alternatively, tie a loop of string through the viewfinder without punching a hole.

5. Invite students to look through their viewfinder, holding it close to their face. Then invite students to look through holding it at arm's length. Ask them how the composition changes when they move the viewfinder. (They should see more of what they're looking at when the viewfinder is close to their face, and "zoom in" on details when it's farther away.)
6. If possible, take the exploration outdoors, or outside the classroom. Encourage students to find interesting compositions through their viewfinders by changing their point of view, e.g., by lying on the ground, turning sideways, going up high, or crouching down low.

Things for students to consider when making:

- How do different viewfinders of different shapes and sizes affect their compositions?

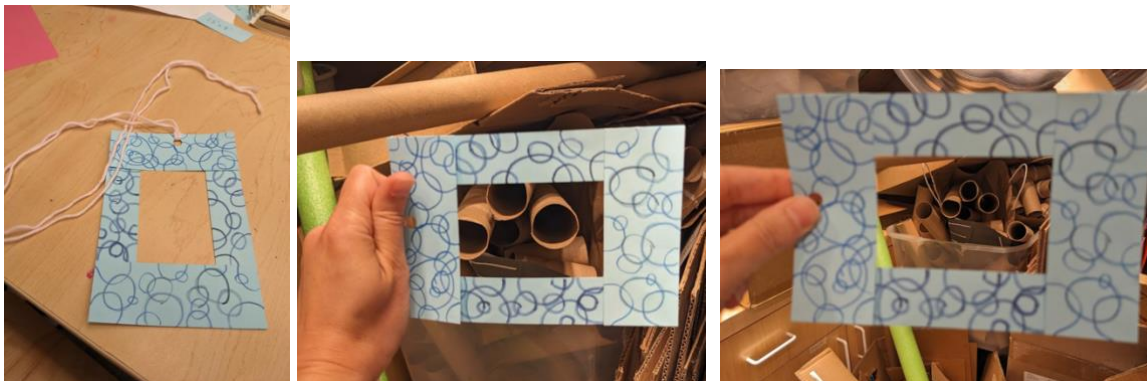
Step by step images for visual activity:



Paper strips, mark making supplies, and glue or tape to create viewfinders.
Neatly align corners and attach with tape or glue.



Form a rectangular window.
Students may add artwork to their paper strips.



Punch a hole in a short edge and loop string through so the viewfinder can be worn.

Viewfinder “zoomed in” on subject, held further from student’s face; a
“zoomed out” view with viewfinder held near the face.

Extension Options:

Extend exploration in one of the following ways: collaborative, sensory, documentary.

- Collaborative: Partners stand back-to-back. One partner holds the viewfinder and describes what they see (shapes, colors, textures, scale, etc.); the other partner draws what their partner describes and can ask questions. This activity encourages students to practice observation, descriptive language, active listening, trust, and tolerance of ambiguity.
- Sensory: Prompt students to find compositions through their viewfinders as a way to explore the sensory world. This exploration is playful, inviting flexible thinking and open-ended conversation. Offer a prompt, give students time to find a point of view, then invite conversations.

Sensory prompt examples:

- Find a composition that feels loud.
 - Find a composition that feels peaceful.
 - Find a composition that looks delicious.
 - Find a composition that feels tense.
 - Find a composition that looks nice to touch.
 - Find a composition that a bug would like to explore.
- Documentary: Invite students to explore their classroom or school using their viewfinder and documenting what they discover as drawings inspired by their found compositions. How does each student experience their space differently?

Adaptations for other grade levels:

For older students, challenge them to cut their own viewfinder from a 4" x 6" or 5" x 7" index card. Students will need to measure a rectangle in the center of their card and cut it out. Students should consider how large a space they would like for their viewfinder and how this will affect the compositions they will discover.

Older students may also draw the compositions they find with their viewfinder.

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org

taft
MUSEUM OF ART

Abstraction—Textiles and Enamels



Edie McKee Harper, *Of Many Colors*, about 1965, wool with metallic thread; linen warp, 13 ½ x 7 ¾ in. Collection of Brett Harper

The variety and contrasting colors used in *Of Many Colors* catch the eye immediately, and the viewer is drawn in by the intimate scale, tactile quality, and familiar materials. Three interconnected strips of woven wool and linen feature squares and rectangles of various colors and sizes, creating a rhythmic composition. Suspended between two horizontal supports, the strips are held together, yet kept separate, by dark-colored lines, which outline and enclose the colored shapes.

Weaving in Color Lesson Plan



Grades: 6-8

Time: 60 minutes

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will be able to discuss and find meaning in Edie Harper's artwork.
2. Students will interpret an abstract artwork, engaging in flexible thinking and the sharing of ideas.
3. Students will choose materials and colors to compose an abstract weaving that holds personal significance.
4. Students will be empowered to experiment and take risks in their design choices and processes.
5. Students will learn basic loom construction and weaving, embracing the material properties of textile artwork.

Learning Targets:

1. I can talk about Edie Harper's artwork.
2. I can gain insight from sharing my interpretations and listening to others' views.
3. I can make choices and take action to convey meaning visually.
4. I can test new ideas and make choices based on my own material explorations.
5. I can create a loom and weave.

Vocabulary:

Warp: in weaving, yarn or thread that is spread lengthwise on a loom (up and down).

Weft: in weaving, yarn or thread that is interlaced (from side to side) with the warp. It is woven over and under the warp.

First, let's look!

Show your students *Of Many Colors* and ask them to look closely for at least 30 seconds.

After looking quietly, ask your students to each write down or come up with one thought for the following prompts: I see _____, I think _____, I wonder_____.

Next, let's talk!

Use the following questions to discuss this artwork's style and subject matter. Encourage your students to use evidence from the artwork to support their answers.

1. What do you notice in this artwork?
2. What do you think it's made of? How did the artist create it?
3. From what you see, how do you think the passage of time played into the creation of this work? Do you imagine she created it all at once or over a period of time?
4. What parts of this work feel "together," or unified, to you? How does Harper create that unity?
5. What feels separate to you? How does Harper create those separations?
6. Why do you think the artist chose to include empty space in this work?

7. Consider the colors. How are they arranged? Is it random or purposeful? What do you see that makes you say that?
8. The artist repeats a similar shape throughout. What do you notice about the sizes? Why does Harper vary the sizes of the shapes?
9. Choose one color in this work to focus on. What words, thoughts, or feelings come to mind when you look at that color? Write down three of them.
10. Do others feel differently about the same color? How do we form our ideas of what colors mean?

Finally, let's create!

Using Edie Harper's artwork as inspiration, students will create looms and woven artworks that convey meaning through color, texture, pattern, and variety. There are many ways to create looms of all sizes using a variety of materials. The directions below use materials that are cost-effective, flexible, portable, and easy to create in a single class period.

Materials for each student:

- A **card** (expired gift card, old school ID, or any rigid credit card-sized card)

*Note: You can use any size or shape of cardboard to construct a loom. Whatever the size, make an even number of slits, and scale the spacing of the warp to fit the size of the loom.
- A **length of string** for the warp of the loom frame. String with no stretch, such as hemp or thin cord, is suggested. The example loom uses roughly 7 feet of string for the warp.

- **Material to weave** the weft, such as yarn, ribbon, or embroidery floss
- A **toothpick** to **tape** to weft material, or a blunt tapestry needle
- Sharp **scissors**
- (optional) A toothpick to raise the warp strings

Directions:

After looking at and discussing *Of Many Colors*, introduce the loom creation and weaving project by showing an example (see below). Invite students to consider the properties of the materials: What does a soft, fluffy yarn communicate? What about a coarse natural fiber? How can materials be combined, grouped, and contrasted to convey meaning?

Before students begin weaving, prompt them to think about what they will create. You can use one of the prompts below or create your own to support your classroom learning.

- Create a woven artwork that represents different parts of your personality and how they interact.
- Create a weaving that represents a past event and its impact on the future.
- Create a weaving that illustrates a story through color, texture, pattern, and variety. Consider characters, setting, action, and mood.
- Create a weaving that represents a place. Consider the history, people, and natural environment.

1. Cut an *even number* of small slits (about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch) at the top and bottom of the card. This example has ten slits. Students can measure, or mark with a marker before cutting.
2. Leaving about a 6-inch tail, insert warp string between each tab. Wind warp string around back to front, inserting string into each tab. Leave another 6-inch tail at the end. (Optional: Insert a toothpick horizontally under the warp strings at the top or bottom of the loom to slightly raise the warp for ease of weaving.)



3. To begin weaving, tape a length of weft yarn (2 to 3 feet long) onto a toothpick (or thread onto needle). Starting from the top or bottom of the loom, guide the toothpick through the loom in an under-over-under-over pattern. Pull the yarn to the end, leaving a 6-inch tail.
4. When you come to the end of a row, weave the toothpick from the opposite direction, in the opposite pattern; over-under-over-under. This weaving pattern can be continued to fill the loom.



5. Use your fingers, the point of your toothpick/needle, or a fork to push the weft together every few passes.
 - a. To change yarns: Cut previous yarn, leaving a 6-inch tail. No need to tie a knot at this point. Tape new yarn onto toothpick, and begin weaving where you left off, leaving a 6-inch tail with the new yarn.
 - b. To add yarn: If you run out of weft yarn before you're finished with that section, simply cut off the toothpick, leaving a tail, tie a new length of yarn to the tail, reattach the toothpick, and continue weaving.
 - c. To weave shapes: You can create geometric or organic shapes by not weaving across a whole row. E.g., to create a rectangle, weave across four warp strings, turn, then weave back across the same four strings. Continue weaving until the rectangle reaches the height you want. To fill in the space around the rectangle, weave on the empty warp strings, making sure to make the final pass onto the same warp string as the previous weaving so there are no gaps.



6. **To remove weaving from loom:** On the back, cut across all warp strings in the middle. Tie two warp strings together, creating five knots at the top and five at the bottom. Any tails from weft strings can simply be pulled to the back, tied together, and trimmed.



Things for students to consider when making:

- Explore different weaving patterns, adding fringe at the bottom, or adding beads.

- Weaving is a meditative process that can be picked up in quiet moments. Consider keeping your loom in your pocket or bag as an activity you can do anywhere.

Extension Options:

- Create a collaborative “community loom” using any large support, such as a big picture frame or clothes rack. Alternatively, strips of fabric can be woven through plastic fencing materials, chicken wire, or other garden/hardware materials.
- Students can hang their finished weavings from a found stick. Once the weaving is removed from the loom, tie the top strings to the stick.
- Glue a strong magnet to the back of a finished weaving and display as a class group in-classroom.

Adaptations:

- For younger students, pre-make the looms by cutting the slits and setting up the warp threads.
- For older middle school and high school students, you can integrate math by having students measure their cards and calculate where to cut the slits for their warp threads.

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org

taft
MUSEUM OF ART

Storytelling



Edie McKee Harper, *Tree House*, 1977, acrylic on canvas, 21 ½ x 9 ¼ in. Collection of Brett Harper

Edie Harper plays with strong lines in this whimsical representation of childhood. Horizontal boards in varying shades of brown and gray come together to craft a homemade playhouse in a strong tree. The tree house occupies almost the entirety of the picture plane with diagonal branches popping out around the background and extending beyond the edge of the canvas. Viewers get the sense that they are among the treetops waiting for an invitation to join the children, whose heads peek around the doorframe and up from the window, in play.

Within this simple composition, *Tree House* evokes the freedom and spirit of children at play. Harper's intention to tell this story of youthful adventure and imagination is made clear in the short text she wrote to accompany the painting:

Playmate, come up and play with me. Climb up my playhouse tree. Hey, come on up here with me, up in the tree. Whee! Up here we are free. Free to see, free to be, free to be whatever we—coming, Mother.

Storytelling Lesson Plan



Grades: 3–5

Time: 45 minutes

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will be able to discuss Edie Harper's artwork and writing.
2. Students will be able to infer a narrative and discern meaning from a work of art.
3. Students will be able to communicate meaning using visual arts.
4. Students will be able to visually summarize key parts of a narrative in an artwork.
5. Students will be able to create artwork that tells a story and draft text to support their artwork.

Learning Targets:

1. I can talk about Edie Harper's artwork.
2. I can determine a story told in a work of art.
3. I can tell a story visually with a work of art.
4. I can determine key details in a story that are necessary to the meaning of the story.
5. I can write text that supports the story in my artwork.

First, let's look!

Show your students *Tree House* and ask them to look closely for at least 30 seconds.

After looking quietly, ask your students to each share one word that this painting brings to mind for them. Discuss why they chose the word they did and how their words are similar and different.

Next, let's talk!

Use the following questions to discuss this artwork's style and subject matter. Encourage your students to use evidence from the artwork to support their answers.

1. What do you notice in this painting?
2. What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What do you think the people in this painting are doing? Why do you think that?

Share Edie Harper's poem about *Tree House* with your students. Discuss the painting and artwork together.

1. What do you think is happening in the poem?
2. How does the poem connect to the painting?
3. What information do we get from the poem that we do not get from the painting?
4. What information do we get from the painting but not the poem?
5. How did your thoughts about the painting change after you read the poem?
6. What activities do you like to do with your friends?
7. Where do you like to go to feel like you have escaped your everyday life?

Finally, let's create!

Using *Tree House* as a starting point and ideas generated from their class discussion, students will create a three-panel comic.

Materials:

- Paper (8" x 10" or larger)
- Pencils
- Colored pencils, crayons, and/or markers
- Black marker

Directions:

1. After looking at and discussing *Tree House*, ask students to imagine that this painting is part of a larger story. Encourage students to brainstorm what the people in *Tree House* were doing before and after this scene.
 - a. Students can sketch or write down their ideas.
 - b. Students should consider what the arc of their story will be. What happens first, what happens next, how does it end?
2. After brainstorming and sketching ideas, students should orient their paper horizontally and fold it into thirds. After folding, students should unfold their paper, revealing three rectangular sections.
3. On each section of the paper, students should draw a large rectangle that fills the top two-thirds of the section. There should be room below the rectangle for writing.
4. In the middle section, using pencils, colored pencils, crayons, etc. students should create their own version of *Tree House*. Encourage

students to make their own artistic choices to communicate a message similar to the one conveyed in Edie Harper's painting.

5. In the first and third section, students will use pencils, colored pencils, crayons, etc. to create the beginning and end scenes of their story.
6. After they have drawn and colored their panels, students can use a black marker to enhance the lines of their drawing.
7. To complete their comic, students should write captions (one- to three-sentences) at the bottom of each image.

Things for students to consider when making:

- What are the most crucial elements of their story?
- How can they communicate these elements visually?
- Edie Harper used a limited color palette and simple lines and shapes to communicate meaning. How can they simplify their visual storytelling?

Extension opportunities:

- Encourage students to work collaboratively to create the three-panel comic.
- Challenge students to work in groups to perform their story. This can be a simple performance or more elaborate, with constructed scenes and scripts.

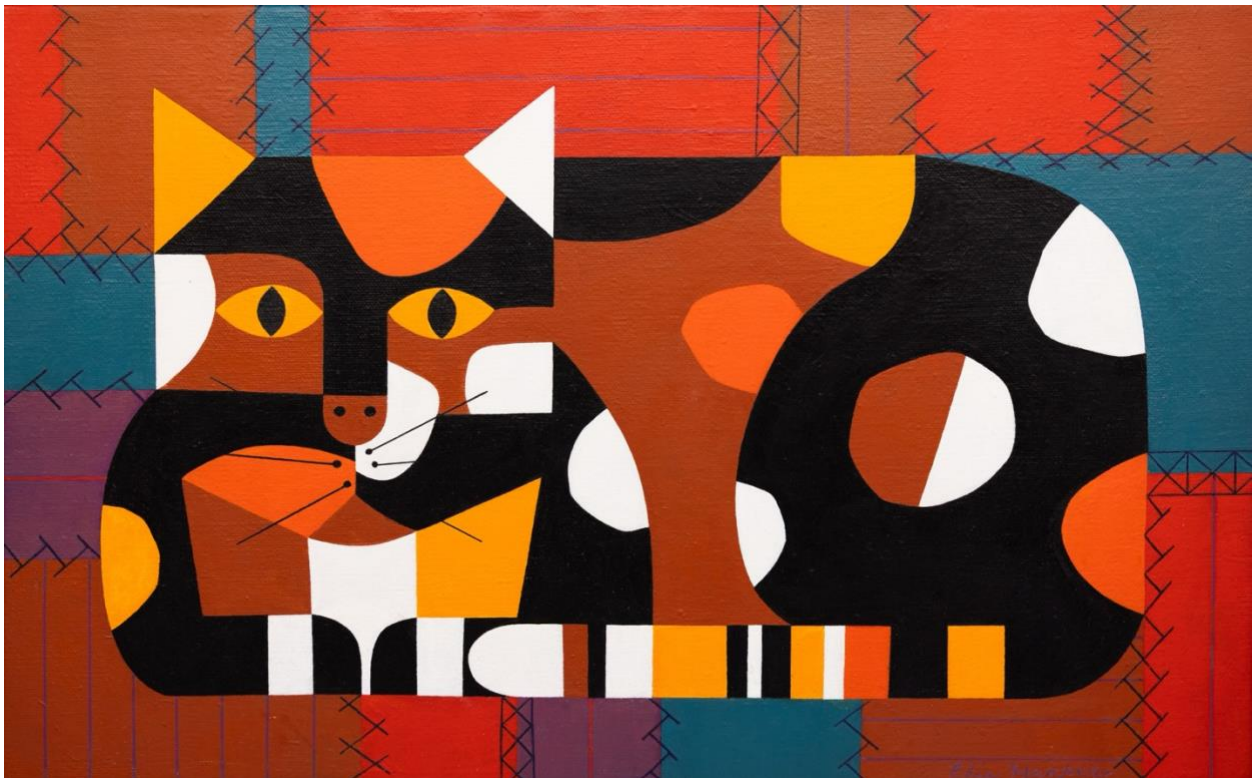
Adaptations for other grade levels:

- For younger students, discuss as a group what they think happened before the scene in *Tree House* and what they think happened after.

They can choose which scene to create as a drawing or collage with cut-paper shapes.

- For older students, incorporate the different parts of the narrative arc (exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution) and encourage extended writing.

The Animal World



Edie McKee Harper, *Crazy Cat on Crazy Quilt (Patches)*, about 1990, acrylic on canvas, 11 1/8 x 17 3/4 in. Collection of Brett Harper

Scraps from here,
Scraps from there,
Silk and satin, velvet and lace—
What a super sleeping place!
Why use a basket or a box
When there's such a comfy spot?
Crazy quilt, yes.
Crazy cat? No!

A whimsical cat is curled up inside a patchwork quilt with wide, watchful eyes, seamlessly blending into the colorful background. Harper knew how to capture the lazy vigilance of housecats and their habit of wedging themselves in hidden places. She often depicted her own pets in her work, and this one is her beloved cat Katrinka. The accompanying poem provides the subject with a sense of humanity and anthropomorphizes the cat's perspective. Harper was inspired by abstraction when creating acrylic paintings, taking inspiration from her love of the animal kingdom and incorporating geometry as a design motif, including vertical and horizontal lines and circular shapes. Harper produced a similar version of this subject as a silkscreen print with the above poem. A mural of *Crazy Cat on Crazy Quilt* was installed in downtown Cincinnati, Ohio, in 2017.

Abstract Animals Lesson Plan



Grade level: K–2

Time to complete: 20–30 minutes

Lesson Goals:

1. Students will learn about abstraction in art.
2. Students will be able to creatively describe and analyze an artwork and explain their thought processes.
3. Students will creatively experiment with various art materials.
4. Students will be able to utilize visual language through geometric shapes, colors, angles, lines, and patterns to communicate meaning.

Learning Targets:

1. I can understand and experiment with abstraction.
2. I can creatively describe and analyze artwork and explain my thought processes.
3. I can experiment with various art materials.
4. I can utilize visual language to communicate meaning.

Vocabulary:

Abstraction: in visual art, to represent something that exists in the real world in an unrealistic, sometimes unrecognizable, way.

Visual language: colors, forms, symbols, etc. that communicate shared messages throughout a culture or society.

First, let's look!

Show your students *Crazy Cat on Crazy Quilt* and ask them to look closely for at least 30 seconds.

Options to enhance looking:

- Set a timer for 2 to 3 minutes and challenge your students to complete a blind contour drawing of the artwork.
 - To complete a blind contour drawing, students will draw what they see without lifting their pencil off the paper and without looking down at the paper.
- Ask students to sketch the different lines and shapes they see in the artwork for 1 minute.

Next, let's talk!

Use the following questions to discuss this artwork's style and subject matter. Encourage your students to use evidence from the artwork to support their answers.

1. What colors, patterns, and shapes do you notice in Harper's artwork?
2. What similarities or differences do you notice between the cat in the foreground and the quilt in the background?
3. What do you think this cat is thinking or feeling? What do you see that makes you say that?
4. If this artwork came to life, how would it move or sound?
5. What adjectives would you use to describe the cat? Encourage students to think about the five senses when describing the cat.
 - a. Examples: colorful, quiet, sneaky, wide-eyed, sleepy, soft, cozy
6. Why do you think Harper chose to depict this cat abstractly?
7. Turn to a classmate and talk about your favorite animal. What habits and characteristics does this animal have that make it your favorite?

Finally, let's create!

Students will create collages of their favorite animal with the materials available. These individual collages will be joined together to form a classroom quilt/mural inspired by Edie Harper's *Crazy Cat on Crazy Quilt* painting.

Materials:

- A square piece of cardboard, poster board, or cardstock to use as a base
- Colored construction paper and/or other colored papers
- Scissors
- Glue sticks and/or tape
- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- Optional materials:
 - Tissue paper, pom-poms or cotton balls, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, yarn, sequins/jewels, feathers, buttons, materials from outside: leaves, twigs, grass, pinecones, etc.

Directions:

1. Have students think about what their favorite animal is. Prompt them to consider what specifically about that animal makes it their favorite.
 - a. Encourage students to visualize the sounds, shapes, smells, features, and characteristics of this animal.
2. Pass out a square-shaped piece of cardboard, card stock, or other support material to each student.
3. Students will use colored paper to cut or tear shapes, and any other supplemental materials to visually represent their chosen animal.
 - a. Encourage students to consider how to represent their animal with different shapes, lines, colors, and patterns using Harper's as inspiration.

- b. If students become stuck, encourage students to consider the properties of the materials (textures, shapes, sizes) and how they can represent different parts of their chosen animal.
 - c. After collaging their animal, encourage students to use markers, crayons, or colored pencils to add details.
4. When all collages are completed, join them together to form a classroom quilt by either gluing or taping them next to each other on a large piece of paper or taping them next to each other on a classroom wall.

Extension options:

- Students can create a title or name for their artwork. The title could be something short and simple and could potentially be an alliteration similar to Harper's title.
- Students can write a short story or poem that describes their animal.
- Students can act out their animal and play charades with classmates to guess what animal each student created before revealing their artwork.

Adaptations for other grade levels:

For older students, discuss both animal selection and what type of background or habitat would be appropriate for their animal. Students can start by creating a simple version of their animal's background with markers, paints, or two-dimensional collage materials. After their backgrounds are complete, they can create their chosen animal on top.

316 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
taftmuseum.org



Edie McKee Harper: Modernist at Play is organized by the Taft Museum of Art
in partnership with the Charley and Edie Harper Art Studio.

EXHIBITION SPONSORS

The H.B., E.W., and F.R. Luther Charitable Foundation, Fifth Third Bank, N.A., Trustee

Dudley S. Taft Lead Unitrust

A Friend of the Taft

This exhibition and related education programming were financially assisted
by The Charlotte R. Schmidlapp Fund, Fifth Third Bank, N.A. Trustee

Cincinnati Art Galleries Panorama

Support for this 2026 FotoFocus Biennial exhibition was provided in part by FotoFocus



Lynne Friedlander and Jay Crawford

EXHIBITION SUPPORT GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY

Bill and Carol Eckerle Endowment

Ellen and George Rieveschl Endowment

Warrington Exhibition Endowment

Chellgren Family Endowment

Sallie Robinson Wadsworth Endowment for Exhibitions

SEASON FUNDERS



The H.B., E.W. and
F.R. Luther Charitable
Foundation, Fifth Third
Bank, N.A., Trustee



OPERATING SUPPORT

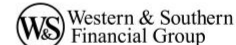


FREE MONDAYS



ACCESS
FOR ALL

FREE SUNDAYS



EDUCATION SPONSORS



The Williams Foundation

EARLY EXPRESSIONS SPONSORS

Support for Early Expressions generously provided by



This program was financially assisted by the
Fifth Third Foundation, Fifth Third Bank, N.A., Trustee

ARTISTS REACHING CLASSROOMS SPONSORS

The Robert Gould Foundation



ART FOR ALL

The August A. Rendigs, Jr.
and Helen Rendigs Foundation

FAMILY FUNDAY MEDIA PARTNER

